Abraham in the Works of John Chrysostom

Demetrios E. Tonias

emerging scholars

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To my wife Maryann.

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I pursue a doctorate. She has been with me virtually every night, keeping company at my side, throughout my studies and especially during the writing and editing. More than any other person, through her kindness and concern for others, it was also she who brought me to an appreciation of the philanthropic ideals that John Chrysostom saw in the patriarch Abraham. This book is as much hers as it is mine, and I dedicate it to her.

Abbreviations

ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers Series
NPNF1	Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers First Series
NPNF2	Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P.Migne
PL	*Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P.Migne
SC	Sources chrétiennes

Introduction

Throughout its first three centuries of existence, the Christian community, while new to the Roman world's pluralistic religious scene, portrayed itself as a historic religion. The early church community claimed the Jewish Bible as their own and looked to it to defend their claims to historicity. While Jews looked to Moses and the Sinai covenant as the focus of their historical relationship with God, the early church fathers and apologists identified themselves as inheritors of the promise given to Abraham and saw their mission to the Gentiles as the fulfillment of God's declaration that Abraham would be "a father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5). Throughout this period there were some like Marcion (d. 160) who rejected the Jewish Bible and any historical connection with Judaism. The church as a whole, however, possessed a self-understanding that the Christian faithful were both the successors and inheritors of the Abrahamic promise. Abraham was *their* father.

The fourth century was a time when the Christian church achieved the status of *religio licita*, one that Judaism had long enjoyed. This was also the time when the church's canon of scripture was finally established and the scriptural text became accessible to a much wider audience.[1] Throughout the fourth century, great theological controversies confronted the church—controversies in no small measure rooted in varying interpretations of the scriptural text—and two ecumenical councils convened to deal with them in 325 and 381.[2]

St. John Chrysostom was born in Antioch in 354 CE.[3] Chrysostom was no stranger to the controversies of his day, having grown up in a town in which

1. Third- and fourth-century figures such as Origen and Athanasius produced lists of scriptural texts that they believed were authentic and suitable for Christian use. The Synod of Hippo produced an official canon of scripture for both the Old and New Testaments in 393. See Bruce Manning Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987).

2. Indeed, the Arian controversy, which was the focus of the first council in 325, was due in large part to Arius's strict adherence to the Old Testament formula that God must be arithmetically "one" (Deut. 6:4).

3. The exact date of Chrysostom's birth is unknown, but estimates range from 344 to 354 CE. Chrysostom's biographer, Palladius, indicates that the exiled bishop of Constantinople was fifty-two years and seven months old when he died in 407, thus placing his birth in 354. For more on the variances in the year of Chrysostom's birth, see the classic treatment on Chrysostom by his namesake, Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, trans. M. Gonzaga, 4 vols. (Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1958), 1:3.

three bishops claimed authority. In his youth, Chrysostom studied rhetoric under the great sophist orator Libanius and theology under the Christian bishop Diodore of Tarsus, the master of the Antiochene School of scriptural exegesis in its later period. After concluding his studies in rhetoric and theology, John retreated to the mountains outside of Antioch where a Syrian anchorite guided his spiritual formation and where he spent the days and nights reading, contemplating, and memorizing the scriptural texts.

The extreme asceticism practiced by Chrysostom during this period of his life resulted in a variety of physical ailments that forced him to return to Antioch where he served the pro-Nicene Bishop of Antioch, Meletius, as an administrative aide. Later on, as a priest, he assisted Flavian, the successor to Meletius (386–397). One of John's principal functions was to preach throughout the week at the cathedral church where his eloquence earned him the title of "golden mouth" or Chrysostom. The sermons that John preached both as a priest and a bishop constitute the core of the Chrysostomic corpus and include biblical, catechetical, pastoral, panegyric, and topical homilies. Rounding out his extant works are letters, ascetical writings, apologetical texts, and various dogmatic treatises.

The story of John Chrysostom's election to the See of Constantinople in 397 and the manner in which he was spirited away from Antioch is well known to students of this era. His name would enter the Synaxarion of the Church as the Archbishop of Constantinople, and it is from his tenure there that the church received the Divine Liturgy that bears his name. His time as the bishop of New Rome, however, was both controversial and relatively short. Chrysostom's tenure on the episcopal throne lasted only six years, ending just before Pascha in 404. Three years later he died in exile. Nevertheless, for thirty-five years, from 372 to 407, John Chrysostom was living a life in the church—not simply on the periphery or on the episcopal throne but continually expounding on the scriptures in the midst of his congregation. Chrysostom was a prolific writer and preacher. The body of his letters, sermons, and treatises that survives exceeds that of any other contemporaneous patristic source in the Christian East and provides us with ample material from which we can glean aspects of his scriptural understanding. Indeed, such was the fame of Chrysostom that his works appeared in Latin almost immediately after his death, reflecting the rare esteem in which his contemporaries held his life and thought, so as to be deemed worthy of dissemination even beyond the Greek world.[4]

4. Ibid., 4:469. Here Baur quotes Jerome who comments in a gloss that, "His writings haste through the world like sudden lightning, as well in the Greek as in the Latin language."

The vast majority of the texts attributed to John Chrysostom come from the time when he served as a presbyter in the church of Antioch (387–398 CE). Chrysostom's homilies and theological writings, like those of other church fathers, were primarily exegetical in nature. As a student of scripture who devoted years of his life to the study and memorization of the biblical texts, John placed the personages of the Jewish Bible prominently in his exegetical discourses. References to scriptural figures such as Abraham, Moses, Elias, and Job populate his writings and sermons and help illuminate his Christian pastoral and theological outlook as well as his attitude toward the Judaism of his day.

We must recognize from the outset that, while Chrysostom often used language that seems harsh by contemporary standards when speaking about Jews and Judaism, he was no Marcion.[5] He fully embraced the Jewish Bible as his own and freely and liberally drew upon the text to address topics such as philanthropy, marriage, and the priesthood. The great exemplars of the Old Testament were *his* exemplars. Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the rest were all preeminent models of virtue whom he saw as worthy of emulation by his flock. Chrysostom employed patriarchs and prophets whenever and wherever he saw fit—whether in a discourse on one of the Gospels or on one of the books of the Pentateuch. Like any reader of scripture, however, Chrysostom had his favorites. Some, like Job and Isaiah, became the subject of a series of homilies in which he recounted their deeds and importance to the faithful to whom he ministered. Others, like Abraham and Moses, received no such focused treatment but rather permeated the writings of the great Antiochene exegete, appearing and reappearing throughout the expanse of his sermons and writings both as models to be emulated by his flock and witnesses to the theological precepts he sought to convey.

Abraham, in particular, occupied a special place in Chrysostom's exegetical heart. Indeed, he said so himself. In *Homily 35 on First Corinthians*, John acknowledges and justifies his frequent reference to Abraham in his sermons. "Let none accuse me of tautology," he tells his congregation, "if I often make mention of [Abraham], and on all occasions: this being that which most of all shows him wonderful, and deprives them that refuse to imitate him of all excuse."[6] It is doubtful that Chrysostom himself ever bothered actually to enumerate the number of times he mentioned Abraham, but an analysis of the corpus of his works demonstrates that he did so over 700 times. Some comments were incidental, a passing reference to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or

5. Regarding Chrysostom's use of the invective, *psogos*, see Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1983), 112–16.

6. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 35, *PG* 61.302 (*NPNF1* 12.213).

mention of the departed resting in the "bosom of Abraham." Other references, however, constitute sermons within a sermon—extended commentaries on the pastoral and theological significance of the patriarch whom God promised would be the father of many nations.

Chrysostom extolled exemplars (moral and otherwise) as part and parcel of his rhetorical style. The Old Testament most certainly presented this great Antiochene exegete with ample material to satisfy the requirements of his rhetorical style. By Chrysostom's own admission, Abraham was preeminent in this role as exemplar—not just for himself but for all preachers of the Christian gospel. In one of his homilies on *Ephesians*, Chrysostom entreats his listeners to allow him to "carry our discourse to Abraham, whom all are continually bringing forward to us above all others."[7] Chrysostom most assuredly brought forth Abraham at every opportunity, using his life and deeds to make a pastoral point, defend a theological position against heretics, or refute the competing claims of Jews, whether contemporary with him in Antioch or found on the pages of the New Testament text. If latter-day figures like Søren Kierkegaard could look to Abraham as a moral force and preeminent theological exemplar, we should hardly wonder that a fourth-century Antiochene homilist and student of the great Libanius, living so much closer to apostolic times and laboring in so rife a scriptural atmosphere, would do the same.

1. Abraham in the Works of Chrysostom

Chrysostom's use of the New Testament scripture has been the object of much research over the centuries. Investigations into his view of the Old Testament and the prominent figures therein, however, are relatively sparse. Indeed, apart from the translation work of Robert Charles Hill, there has been very little recent scholarship analyzing Chrysostom's interpretation of the Old Testament. Two notable exceptions are Hagit Amirav's recent work that examines Chrysostom's exegesis of Noah and the flood,[8] and Duane Garrett's 1992 study of Chrysostom's commentary on the first eight chapters of Isaiah.[9] At present, however, despite the consistent and frequent reference to Abraham throughout the Chrysostomic corpus, there exists no scholarly examination of Chrysostom's treatment of Abraham.

7. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 21, *PG* 62.153 (*NPNF1* 13.156).

8. Hagit Amirav, *Rhetoric and Tradition: John Chrysostom on Noah and the Flood*, Traditio Exegetica Graeca (Leuven: Peeters, 2003).

9. Duane A. Garrett and Chrysostom John, *An Analysis of the Hermeneutics of John Chrysostom's Commentary on Isaiah 1–8 with an English Translation*, vol. 12, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1992).

The aforementioned studies on Noah and Isaiah were both examinations of extant homilies on these specific figures of the Old Testament. The fact that Chrysostom's works do not contain a similar set of homilies on Abraham presents both an opportunity and a challenge. The absence of a series of homilies on Abraham warrants an examination of the Abrahamic references throughout Chrysostom's homilies. Such an examination is beneficial in that it provides a much broader and deeper understanding of how Chrysostom viewed Abraham from a thematic perspective.

Toward this end, a detailed study of every direct reference to Abraham in the corpus of Chrysostom's works will culminate in determining the principal qualities and theological importance of the patriarch in Chrysostom's homilies and discourses. Using the Chrysostomic texts contained within the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* as a source, I have constructed a relational database in which each reference to Abraham was logged in the original Greek with an English translation. A major theme was identified for each reference along with several pertinent keywords to help identify the major attributes of Chrysostom's exegetical view of Abraham. The associated research resulted in an inventory that contained 633 entries. This inventory, however, needed to be more than a simple listing of individual quotes. Each Chrysostomic reference to Abraham needed to be bracketed, categorized, and organized in such a way that would allow the prevalent themes to emerge and thus lead us to a thematic understanding of Chrysostom's view of the patriarch. The results of the research and associated analysis reveal the profound respect and admiration in which John held Abraham. Indeed, one can argue that his admiration for the great patriarch rivals his veneration for the Apostle Paul—a not altogether insignificant statement given the praise heaped upon Paul by John.[10]

Chrysostom's admiration for Abraham translated into a frequent use of the patriarch as a rhetorical tool to make a variety of pastoral and theological points. The first chapter examines the literary, rhetorical, and exegetical tradition that helped influence Chrysostom's use of Abraham as a preeminent model of virtue. As a student of Libanius, Chrysostom was steeped in the sophistic rhetorical method and familiar with Neoplatonic and Stoic models from which he freely appropriated and which he applied to his homiletic references to Abraham. Chrysostom used these rhetorical methods and his natural oratorical skills to paint a verbal icon of Abraham using dramatic and ekphrastic language.

10. There is, no doubt, a reflexive quality to Chrysostom's high regard for both Paul and Abraham since Paul, like Chrysostom, frequently referred to Abraham to define the church vis-à-vis Israel. Indeed, Chrysostom's commentary on the Pauline epistles is foundational to his understanding of Abraham, and Pauline language permeates his homiletical references on the Old Testament patriarch.

The result was an indelible portrait of the white-haired patriarch as an Old Testament Stoic sage who transcended nature in order to obey the commandments of God. In addition to this secular training, Chrysostom was also a student of Diodore of Tarsus and a product of the Antiochene School of scriptural exegesis. This literal mode of exegesis clearly influenced Chrysostom, and his exegetical references to Abraham demonstrate his Antiochene roots. Related to these influences is the particular Lucianic recension of the Septuagint text along with Origen's Hexapla, which Chrysostom used as the scriptural basis of his exegetical homilies.[11] The *sensus literalis* of the scriptural text was an important feature of Antiochene exegesis, and Chrysostom's faithfulness to this method prompted him to make forays into the original Hebrew—albeit through the transliterated, second column of Origen's parallel text.

The next three chapters describe the qualities of Abraham that Chrysostom viewed as central to the application of the Old Testament patriarch as a pastoral model and theological figure. Chapter Two explores Chrysostom's view of Abraham as the preeminent man of virtue and describes how he wedded the biblical characteristics of Abraham's faith and righteousness with the Greek philosophical categories of virtue. Chrysostom was most certainly familiar with the Greek philosophical genre of the βίος, or life, in which a politician, literary figure, or philosopher is put forth as a model worthy of emulation. Such an approach was indeed popular with the Alexandrian school of exegesis and with the Jewish philosopher Philo (from whom the Alexandrians derived a considerable amount of exegetical material). Although Chrysostom, hailing as he did from the Antiochene School, was far less prone to these allegorical moves than his Alexandrian contemporaries, he nevertheless populated his homilies with scriptural figures that fulfilled a similar function. To Chrysostom, Abraham was every bit the Stoic man of virtue that he was to the Alexandrians.

In Chapter Three, I investigate the pastoral application of these virtuous attributes. Throughout Chrysostom's homilies, the virtues of Abraham are presented to the congregation in an effort to exhort them to emulate the great patriarch who left his father's land to follow the call of God. Chrysostom contextualized the Genesis narrative for his flock to show Abraham as a model of philanthropy and hospitality. The example of Abraham filled a variety of needs—for Chrysostom he was at once the perfect child and the perfect parent. Above all else, Chrysostom saw Abraham as the model Christian, even though

11. It should be noted that there is some debate as to whether or not Chrysostom relied solely on the Lucianic recension. See Mario Cimosa, "John Chrysostom and the Septuagint (Job and Psalms)," in *12th Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Leiden, 2004*, ed. Melvin K. H. Peters (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 129.

he lived centuries before the events of the New Testament. Indeed, in Chrysostom's eyes, Abraham's faith and righteousness (like that of the other Old Testament exemplars) was even more remarkable since his achievements came *before* the coming of Christ.[12]

Chapter Four contains an examination of the theological implications of Chrysostom's image of Abraham. Central to the theology surrounding the person of Abraham in Chrysostom's writings is the idea of covenant and how the Christian church represents the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, chief of which (in Chrysostom's eyes) is the Abrahamic covenant. Other theological questions that arise out of God's promise to Abraham are the nature of priesthood, the role of sacrificial worship, faith and Law, and the incorporation of Gentiles into Israel.

One of the central theological and pastoral concerns of Chrysostom was the relationship of the Christian community to the Israel described in the Old Testament. Chrysostom was concerned about a significant percentage of his flock that worshiped at both the church and the synagogue—an unavoidable reality in the religiously and culturally diverse atmosphere of fourth-century Antioch. The famous six homilies and two discourses *Against Judaizing Christians* highlight the competition between Chrysostom's church and the local Jewish community in Antioch. This competition is no less evident throughout John's homilies, in which he uses Abraham to help support his contention that the church, rather than the synagogue, is the inheritor of the blessings bestowed on Abraham.

With this in mind, Chapter Five examines Chrysostom's use of Abraham to articulate the theological differences between the Christianity and the Judaism of his day. As Robert Wilken and, more recently, Isabella Sandwell have noted, in order to understand the nature of Chrysostom's rhetoric against Judaism it is necessary to understand the nature of religious pluralism in fourth-century Antioch. During Chrysostom's life, the reign of Julian and the attempted restoration of the pagan cult had come and gone. The position of the church in general and Nicene Christianity in particular, however, was far from secure—at

12. Of course, Chrysostom was not averse to diminishing Abraham when noting the superiority of the New Testament narrative to that of the Old. For example in his discourses *Against Judaizing Christians*, the encounter of Abraham with Melchizedek and its associated intertextual implications is one of these rare instances in which Chrysostom elevates another scriptural figure over Abraham when he remarks that Melchizedek "is surely much more venerable than Abraham" since Christ is a priest according to Melchizedek. Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.925, John Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, trans. Paul W. Harkins, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1979), 199.

least in the minds of the church hierarchy. Chrysostom's teacher Libanius preached a syncretistic form of religious pluralism—a syncretism practiced by members of his own flock as they freely moved between synagogue and church. Chrysostom, like other church leaders of the fourth century, was very concerned with defining and defending the boundaries of his community, and he often looked to Abraham in order to delineate those boundaries with pagans, with heretical Christian sects, and with the Jewish community of Antioch.

This rhetoric, born out of the realities of religious life in fourth-century Antioch, while most commonly associated with Chrysostom's homilies and discourses *Against Judaizing Christians*, is not confined to these texts but spills out into his other homilies. Abraham is often a lightning rod for such discourse. Even when John offers a reference to Abraham to make some other point, Chrysostom often cannot resist making a peripheral comment about Judaism. In this chapter, the manner in which Chrysostom references Abraham throughout the corpus is examined to help clarify his position vis-à-vis Judaism. In some instances the contemporaneous points of contention between Christians and Jews based on Chrysostom's homiletical discourse with the Jews of his day come to the fore.[13] For Chrysostom, whoever owned Abraham owned the inheritance to all of the Old Testament scripture. In his references to Abraham, Christians, not Jews, were the true sons of Abraham, not by blood or by circumcision, but by faith and through emulation of the patriarch's virtue. Chrysostom consistently tells his flock that they are the scriptural stones from which Christ has raised them as new children of Abraham.

The final chapter and appendices contain an analysis and translation of the (currently disputed) Chrysostomic homily *De beato Abraham*.[14] The homily is in part a discourse on the virtuous qualities of Abraham and in part a discussion of Moses and the Exodus Passover narrative. Among the compilers of Chrysostom's *Opera Omnia*, there have been some like Fronton du Duc, who have classified the text as authentically Chrysostom. Others, such as Henry Savile and later Bernard de Montfaucon, held a less favorable opinion of the text. Research revealed, however, that the arguments against the homily's authenticity were based, in part, on the reading of a truncated manuscript and a general impression that the homily lacked a "familiar" Chrysostomic tone. While other observers have characterized *De beato Abraham* under the heading of *dubia*, my analysis of the data assembled for the present study shows that

13. It was not uncommon for Chrysostom to use a contrived debate with a theoretical Jew opposing one of his positions in order to prove a point. See *In Genesim* 31, *PG* 53.288.

14. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.737–46.

there is sufficient evidence to reclassify this text as an authentic homily of Chrysostom. My investigation indicates that the language and the style used in *De beato Abraham* are consistent with that found in other homilies in which Chrysostom makes reference to Abraham. Appendix B contains a comparative table that illustrates this similarity between the language and style of *De beato Abraham* and that found in the accepted corpus of Chrysostom's homilies and discourses.

The homily is also of interest because it contains a rhetorical attack on Jews and Judaism. As in Chrysostom's other comments on the contemporaneous Jewish community, he challenges what he perceives as a misunderstanding of how the Old Testament relates to the New. For Chrysostom, the inability of Jews to grasp the Christological underpinnings of their sacred text simply indicates that the church, not the synagogue, is the true and rightful interpreter of the Jewish Bible. The homily is also useful because it contains, like other Chrysostom homilies already mentioned, hypothetical interactions between Christians and Jews, with Chrysostom providing the appropriate responses for his flock to offer when challenged by members of the synagogue regarding aspects of the Christian faith such as baptism and communion.

2. Chrysostom's Use of Abraham in Patristic Studies

There have been significant strides in recent years in the study of Chrysostom's understanding of and commentary upon the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the fact that there was previously no treatment of such a prominent figure as Abraham—a figure to whom Chrysostom refers so frequently in his works—clearly illustrates the importance of such an examination and the research that needs to take place on other such figures, among whom Moses figures most prominently. One of the primary benefits of such an examination, therefore, is to at least somewhat remedy this oversight and serve to further illumine the scholarly understanding of Abraham, Chrysostom, and the Christian-Jewish relationship in the fourth century. As indicated above, part of the reason why no one has undertaken a study such as this previously is the lack of a series of discrete homilies on the person of Abraham. The same can be said for Moses and Joseph, two other figures mentioned frequently by Chrysostom without a significant body of extended and dedicated homilies. While Chrysostom provides such homiletical treatments of a figure like Isaiah or Job, he is more likely to season his sermons with extended examinations of these prominent figures at different instances in order to convey different messages to his congregation.

Self-contained patristic treatments of Old Testament figures, like that of Gregory of Nyssa on Moses, have drawn considerable attention because they present a static target for the scholar. Chrysostom's homiletical style, however, does not lend itself well to such an approach. This style is due, in part, to Chrysostom's profound knowledge of the scriptural text and his ability to draw on it at will, that is, spontaneously and even in an improvisatory fashion. His style is also affected, however, by the nature of his pastoral activities, which demanded that he speak thematically on subjects as the need arose. For example, a string of anti-Arian homilies was interrupted by Chrysostom so that he could preach his homilies *Against Judaizing Christians*.

One of the values of a study such as this is that it illustrates how Chrysostom utilized scriptural figures as part of a toolset to be employed in different situations according to pastoral necessity. Indeed, it is only through an examination such as this, in which every reference to Abraham is identified and analyzed, that we can begin to determine, with some degree of certainty, Chrysostom's full view of Abraham.

For Chrysostom, Abraham was both a pastoral and theological tool. His frequent use of this tool provides us with a systematic lens through which to view the various literary, rhetorical, and exegetical influences that shaped his sermons and resulted in his fame as the "golden mouthed" homilist. In his references to Abraham we see the familiar Pauline influence, illustrating the great patriarch as the preeminent man of faith and the father of the gentile nations grafted into the tree of Israel. He also placed Abraham before his congregation as a Stoic sage, a man of virtue whose courage and confidence helped him transcend nature. At the same time he is the Old Testament man of righteousness with a defined typological role to play in the New Testament narrative to come. Finally, Abraham serves as a weapon to be used in Chrysostom's ongoing competition with the Jewish community of Antioch.

Perhaps most importantly, this investigation of Abraham illustrates the use of an Old Testament figure by a significant church father across the entire corpus of his work. Analyses of specific treatises or works, while beneficial and necessary, are by definition limited. This examination may also provide a departure point for further investigation into Chrysostom's view of other Old Testament figures and help inform and enhance our understanding of the various pastoral and theological themes that he associated with Abraham.

1

Literary, Rhetorical, and Exegetical Influences

1. Introduction

John Chrysostom received a classical education as a young man and by all accounts excelled in that education.[1] As a student, John was formed in a program of Greek classical education that, as J. N. D. Kelly observes, had scarcely undergone any serious modification since the fourth century before Christ."[2] Although John later became a Christian, he did not leave this education behind. John used the philosophical and rhetorical methods he learned from his teacher Libanius, the preeminent rhetor of his day, to help mold his congregation into his conception of a faithful Christian community. In the same way, John was also the member of a particular Christian circle, located in Antioch, which had its own literary and exegetical tradition that helped shape John's theological and pastoral outlook. In this chapter I will examine the literary, rhetorical, and exegetical tradition that Chrysostom inherited and to which he subscribed. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, this tradition influenced John's presentation of Abraham throughout the corpus of his works.

It is certainly ironic that John, who devoted so much homiletical space to the disparagement of sophistry and philosophy, was so adept at using these methods for his Christian purposes. Much of John's skill as an orator flowed from his natural talent. Much can also be attributed to the sophistic formation he received from Libanius. Libanius was a staunch defender of the historic, Greco-Roman religious cult but was nevertheless responsible for the classical

1. Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, trans. M. Gonzaga, 4 vols. (Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1958), 1:22ff.

2. John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom, Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 6.

education of such prominent Christians as John Chrysostom and his classmate, Theodore of Mopsuestia. In many ways, John and Libanius were engaged in similar enterprises. Both sought to promote their own particular vision of how the fourth-century world should function. Where Libanius promoted a pluralistic society based on established classical modes of virtue, Chrysostom desired an exclusive Christian religious environment with its own particular model of virtue as the standard. Chrysostom used the sophistic techniques of encomium and diatribe that he learned from Libanius to convince his flock that his particular vision of civic and moral virtue was superior. Chrysostom's ultimate goal was the formation of his flock in accordance with his understanding of virtue.

Greek philosophical schools, most notably the Stoics and Sophists, were engaged in a similar program of formation, and Christians like John borrowed from their pedagogical tradition. The Stoics were especially concerned with forming virtuous men. John and other Christians appropriated their methods as they attempted to define their own particular Christian virtue. One noteworthy Stoic technique was to present a virtuous exemplar to be imitated by members of their philosophical school. As we will see in the following chapters, Chrysostom used Abraham as such a model throughout his works.

Chrysostom was well acquainted with Greek classical literature that was the basis of his education. As a Christian homilist and exegete, however, John had his own Christian literary tradition, a preeminent element of which was the scriptural text composed of the Old and New Testaments. Although John was familiar with and utilized a variety of Old Testament editions, the Lucianic recension was the basis for his exegesis. John's classical training did not provide him with the skills necessary to work with the Hebrew text. His ignorance of Hebrew, however, did not deter him from occasionally referencing the original language of the Old Testament in order to make an exegetical point.

Within the scriptural text, Paul's epistolary corpus was central to John's Christian theological outlook in general and his understanding of Abraham in particular. The large number of homilies Chrysostom offered on the Pauline corpus bears witness to this influence. Therefore, Paul's numerous references to Abraham in his epistles provided Chrysostom with ample material from which he fashioned his rhetorical presentation of Abraham's virtue. Paul's interpretation of Abraham within the Christian context helped John articulate to his audience the relationship of Abraham to the Christian narrative and that of the Christian community to Israel.

If John was educated in a particular school of Greek philosophical and rhetorical thought, he also came from a particular Christian tradition of

scriptural interpretation. John was formed in the Antiochene exegetical tradition, which eschewed the allegorical approach of the Alexandrian method for a more literal reading of the text. In the historical development of the Antiochene method of exegesis, we see that Chrysostom emerged from an interpretive tradition that looked into the scriptural text for profound moral teachings. Thus Abraham, as a prominent figure of that text, had a significant pastoral role to play in the daily lives of Chrysostom's flock.

In this chapter, therefore, I will examine the various classical and Christian influences on Chrysostom's homiletical and exegetical approach, which includes Stoicism, sophistic rhetoric, Libanius's rhetorical style, the scriptural text in general and Pauline corpus in particular, the Christian textual tradition, and Antiochene exegetical method. In this discussion, we will see that Chrysostom was indeed a product of the fourth-century Roman world, in both its classical and Christian contexts, and was well equipped to compete in the public arena of ideas. Each of these classical and Christian elements helped contribute to the way in which Chrysostom communicated his pastoral and theological views to his congregation.

2. Stoicism

Stoicism was a Hellenistic philosophical system that originated in the third century BCE and emphasized the practice of virtue as part of a discipline to achieve happiness. Stoic philosophy had a long tradition in Christian thought, one that in many ways can be traced to the Jewish philosopher Philo, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher of the first century who was influential on many Christian authors.[3] Although church fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa disavowed Stoic philosophy because of its pagan roots, they nevertheless were drawn to many of the concepts that had cognates in Christian discourse, such as an emphasis on the practice of virtue.

The Stoic man of virtue was in control of his passions [ἀπάθεια], which allowed him to make sound judgments regarding which actions were proper and which were not. Of the four cardinal virtues mentioned above, the chief of them was prudence.[4] Prudence allowed the Stoic sage to make the correct decisions and demonstrate proper discernment [διάκρισις]. One can see

3. See David T. Runia, "Philo of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Thought," *Studia Philonica Annual* 7 (1995).

4. For more on the Stoic concept of virtue and the passions, see Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, 2 vols., Studies in the History of Christian Thought (Boston: Brill, 1985), 42ff.

cardinal virtues of a Stoic sage through the lens of prudence. Thus, "Courage is the correct judgment as to what must be endured. Temperance is the correct judgment in the choice of things. Justice is the correct judgment in the use of things."[5] Naturally, for the church fathers, the correct choices are Christian choices.

One should not be surprised that the church fathers borrowed from Stoicism in different fashions. Stoicism itself went through various stages of development as it began to accrue layers of Platonic and pagan religious thought. The patristic writers borrowed from Stoic forms in an eclectic and uneven fashion based in part on their familiarity with these traditions, their local culture, and individual temperaments.[6] In Alexandria, for example, Clement and then Origen saw Stoicism through Greek philosophical eyes, where scriptural events and figures pointed to a deeper, inner meaning. Thus the departure of Abraham from Ur points to a departure from the material and sensual world into a world of reason.

In general, such Antiochene exegetes as John Chrysostom fell under the influence of Stoicism but without its allegorical clothing. The early church fathers promoted scriptural and hagiographic exemplars as virtuous models to be emulated by their flock. The Stoic man of virtue was a staple in Chrysostom's writings, and the Old Testament provided an ample supply of figures to be adapted to this model. Where the Alexandrians absorbed the allegorical *theoria* of Stoic thought, the Antiochenes were much more literal in their application of the Stoic virtuous exemplar. As Leokadia Malunowiczówna noted, for Antiochenes such as John Chrysostom, the Stoic concept of the supreme good was not some form of Alexandrian allegorical abstraction but rather was directly related to God.[7] Abraham leaving Chaldea, for Chrysostom, was simply an act that demonstrated the patriarch's obedience, right-mindedness, and faith. His exegesis is a straightforward line-by-line analysis of the virtuous characteristics that led Abraham to follow God's instruction.

For Chrysostom, the true meaning of the scriptural text is the virtuous example it provides with figures such as Abraham—an approach exemplified by the monks of his day as they "imitated Abraham" and "fled public hubbub" in order to pursue the ascetic life.[8] The Antiochenes found the moral aspects of

5. Ibid., 44.

6. Paul Agaësse, "Patristique et stoïcisme," *Recherches de science religieuse* 88, no. 2 (2000): 260.

7. Leokadia Malunowiczówna, "Les éléments stoïciens dans la consolation grecque chrétienne," *Studia Patristica* 13 (1975): 35.

8. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 3 vols., Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 2:243.

Stoicism attractive, and certainly those features of Stoic thought that resisted the decadence of Roman society resonated with Antiochene preachers exemplified by John Chrysostom.

In her analysis of Chrysostom's exegetical view of Noah, Hagit Amirav describes why Chrysostom was attracted to the Stoic model, noting that the "Stoic-like emotional control of the virtuous man and his detachment from the multitude's usual preference and goals are eulogized . . . as a means of overcoming unavoidable confrontations between the wicked and the righteous."[9] Chrysostom projected Stoic attributes onto the figures Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others in an effort to communicate to his flock the virtue he saw in these scriptural personages and which he desired his congregation to emulate. The Antiochenes, and especially Chrysostom, were in short, less concerned about exploring the mystical ascent of the figure from the sensual world to the divine than they were about communicating a practical, virtuous way of life to their flocks.[10]

Chrysostom and other exegetes found an attractive model in the bearded Stoic sage who was a courageous philosopher engaged in moral, rather than mortal, combat. Rosemary Ruether describes this struggle [ἀγών] as one with "far deeper life-and-death significance than the combat of the soldier."[11] The philosopher champion is an athlete struggling against the passions to secure a great prize.[12] Such language is clearly present in the Pauline epistles. This type of athletic imagery was certainly nothing new and was prevalent in Hellenistic Jewish writings such as the Philonic corpus and 4 Maccabees. Victor Pfitzner questions whether there was a direct literary link from Paul to such Hellenistic Jewish sources but ultimately concludes that it is "relatively unimportant" whether or not Paul was directly influenced by "his immediate contact with the popularized language and imagery of his day or in contact with the Hellenistic synagogue."[13] Nevertheless, such Stoic usage was certainly in the air at the time of Paul and was absorbed by him.

9. Hagit Amirav, *Rhetoric and Tradition: John Chrysostom on Noah and the Flood*, Traditio Exegetica Graeca (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 166.

10. To be fair, Chrysostom makes a similar reference, noting that Abraham was "the just man [who] kept his yearning on spiritual things after he had been promised visible goods." Chrysostom, however, far from making a deep allegorical association, is simply anticipating the words of Paul while at the same time providing the basis of a lesson on wealth for his congregation. *Catecheses ad illuminandos* 1–8, *SC* 50.8. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Walter Burghardt, trans. Paul W. Harkins, vol. 31, Ancient Christian Writers (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1963), 123.

11. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Courage as a Christian Virtue," *Cross Currents* 33, no. 1 (1983): 9.

12. Marcus Aurelius describes this struggling athlete as "ἀθλητὴν ἄθλου τοῦ μεγίστου, τοῦ ὑπὸ μηδενὸς πάθους καταβληθῆναι." *M. Aurel*. 3.4.3.5.

The Pauline influence on Chrysostom and the other Antiochenes, as described later, was indeed profound and, combined with their own similar cultural exposure to Stoicism, no doubt led to their appropriation of such Stoic athletic imagery in their exegesis. Indeed, the Stoic athletic ideal is present in the famous letter of Ignatius of Antioch to Polycarp throughout the first three chapters of the epistle. In *Polycarp* 3.1, Ignatius states that "[i]t is the part of a noble athlete to be wounded, and yet to conquer."[14] That this prominent Antiochene first-century father of the church used such profoundly Stoic language indicates that the use of this type of language indeed had a long history in Antiochene Christian discourse.

3. Sophist Rhetoric

A significant percentage of scriptural exegesis from the early church fathers is homiletic in nature, and consequently the homiletical style had a profound impact on the nature of their exegesis. Chrysostom was an adherent of the oratorical and rhetorical style of the Second Sophistic period that originated in the first century CE, and sophistic oratory was the standard by which all speech was measured.[15] Oratory in antiquity was entertainment, and the sophistic style, which Chrysostom embraced, was as much show as it was substance. So pervasive was the expectation of such entertainment that it was not uncommon for the audience to break into applause during a sophist's oration. The sermons of John Chrysostom indicate that this practice was also prevalent in the Antiochene church—much to his consternation. As shown by Ameringer in his classic treatment of Chrysostom's rhetorical style, the Second Sophistic period, which sought to revive the classical Greek rhetorical style of Demosthenes, Isocrates, and Plato (among others), was profoundly influential on homilists such as John Chrysostom. Chrysostom's reaction to sophistic speech, however, was mixed.[16]

One of the features of the Second Sophistic movement was the use of figures from antiquity to convey a point. Contemporaneous figures were

13. Victor C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature*, Novum Testamentum (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 5.

14. *Polycarp* 3.1 (*NPNF1* 1.94).

15. E. G. Clark notes that recently scholars are increasingly aware of the important role rhetoric played in the presentation and tone of early Christian homiletics stating that "this interest in the uses of rhetoric has led to a stronger sense of Christian texts as rhetoric, perpetuating and exploiting the traditions of public speech." E. G. Clark, "Pastoral Care: Town and Country in Late-Antiquity Preaching," in *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity*, ed. Thomas S. Burns and John W. Eadie (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 270–71.

deemed to be both banal and boring. Even when addressing contemporaneous themes, the sophistic orators did so through the use of historical figures, taking the theme and "surrounding it with the glamour of antiquity."[17] Quite naturally, the great exemplars of the Old Testament provided ample glamour to accommodate this aspect of sophistic oratory. Indeed, Chrysostom frequently applied Abraham, Moses, Noah, Job, and other figures of the Old Testament to a host of contemporaneous situations encountered by his flock in an effort to support his position. Thus Chrysostom presented the historic Abraham to his flock as a model parent, husband, and philanthropist. Chrysostom took literally the need to "surround" a topic with the "glamour of antiquity," often referencing multiple Old Testament figures together in succession in order to prove his point. For example, Chrysostom instructed his flock to emulate the virtue of the great Old Testament saints who achieved virtue without the benefit of a teacher. John told his flock that such virtue "is possible, even very easy, if we are willing: and this they show, who first duly performed these things, as for instance, Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek, Job, and all the men like them. To them it is needful to look every day."[18] It was not simply one figure of the Old Testament or another but the multitude of them that bore witness to the lesson he taught.

It may seem odd that Chrysostom used sophistic oratory since he employed such harsh language to describe Greek philosophy and philosophers. For example, he called the philosophers of Antioch "outcast dogs" [τὰ κυνικὰ καθάρματα] since they fled Antioch during times of danger while the Christian monks gathered in the city to console the citizens.[19] The prevailing wisdom at the end of the nineteenth century supported the view that Chrysostom, because he appeared to be so hostile to Greek rhetors, was by association similarly antagonistic toward their methods.[20]

The results of this present study, however, along with the scholarship of Robert Wilken and others, show this view to be shortsighted. Put simply,

16. Thomas Edward Ameringer, *The Stylistic Influence of the Second Sophistic on the Panegyrical Sermons of St. John Chrysostom: A Study in Greek Rhetoric* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1921).

17. Ibid., 13.

18. *In Matthaeum* 64, *PG* 58.616 (*NPNF1* 10.378).

19. *Ad populum Antiochenum* 17, *PG* 49.173.

20. This was the thinking of historians such as Edward Gibbon and Eduard Norden and echoed by Aimé Puech who wrote, "Quelque différente que soit son éloquence de celle des panégyristes et des sophistes, quoiqu'il se fût même formé une rhétorique toute contraire par ses principes et sa méthode à celle de Libanius . . ." See Aimé Puech, *Un réformateur de la société chrétienne au IVe siècle: Saint Jean Chrysostome et les moeurs de son temps* (Paris: Hachette, 1891), 121.

Chrysostom employed sophistic methods to condemn the sophists and, indeed, anyone else whom he viewed as a threat to the boundaries of his community. The language that Chrysostom used to describe those outside the "orthodoxy" of his belief, like that of the sophists, was often harsh. One should not, however, view such condemnatory language as a black-and-white distinction that left room for neither appreciation nor appropriation of the group in question. Simply because Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, and other patristic figures of the day condemned Greek philosophers does not mean that they eschewed their methods. For example, Gregory of Nyssa held a negative opinion of Philo's work and yet was not only familiar with his writings but was also clearly influenced by the Jewish philosopher from Alexandria.[21]

One can also safely attribute Chrysostom's harsh rhetoric, in part, to his reliance on Stoic forms in general and the Stoic philosopher Epictetus in particular. In his works, Chrysostom makes direct reference to Epictetus and echoes the Stoic's belief that harsh and honest language actually is for the benefit of the one castigated. Chrysostom's strong language was therefore part of a philosophical school that held that the greater the sickness the harsher the language required in order to cure the sickness of error.[22] In Chrysostom's mind, he was simply following the same type of spiritual discipline that his hero Paul held out to the early Christian churches by offering rebuke as well as praise.[23]

Other patristic authors likewise regularly and strongly condemned pagan education and yet utilized its methods and, at times, offered a tacit endorsement of its place in Christian thought. Telling them that "after the manner of bees must we use these writings, for the bees do not visit all the flowers without discrimination, nor indeed do they seek to carry away entire those upon which they light, but rather, having taken so much as is adapted to their needs, they let the rest go," Basil of Caesarea is renowned for his instruction to the young men of his community regarding the proper Christian use of Greek literature.[24] Chrysostom offers similar advice in his first homily on 2 Thessalonians,

21. Geljon, citing the work of Michel Aubineau, Jean Daniélou, David Runia, and Monique Alexandre, notes the influence of Philo on Gregory of Nyssa. Despite this influence, Gregory had a generally negative view of Philo due to his association of Philonic thought with the Neo-Arian Eunomian heresy. See A. C. Geljon, *Philonic Exegesis in Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Moysis*, Studia Philonica Monographs (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2002), 52–53.

22. For a larger discussion on the philosophical influences on Chrysostom's rhetorical style, see David Rylaarsdam, "Painful Preaching: John Chrysostom and the Philosophical Tradition of Guiding Souls," *Studia Patristica* 41 (2006).

23. "For this is ever a part of Paul's wisdom, to mix painful things with kind ones." *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 8, *PG* 63.71 (*NPNF1* 14.405).

instructing his congregation to "read, if you will, both our own (books), and those without: for they also abound in such examples. If you despise ours, and this from pride; if you admire the works of philosophers, go even to them. They will instruct you, relating ancient calamities, as will poets, and orators, and sophists, and all historians. From every side, if you will, you may find examples."[25]

The lessons to be gleaned from these quotes are twofold. First, although Chrysostom railed against Greek philosophers and their methods, he was more than willing to play the part of Basil's bee and make use of those aspects of philosophical thought and oratory that suited his needs. Second, the invective of Chrysostom, as part of sophistic diatribe, does not necessarily imply an absolute and exclusive position but rather is part and parcel of his sophistic oratorical style and should be taken as such.[26]

Nevertheless, one should not infer that Chrysostom swallowed the sophist fish, bones and all. While embracing aspects of the oratorical style, he categorically rejected the sophist's emphasis on rhetorical flourishes at the expense of truth and virtue. The goal of the sophist orator was neither to present the truth nor to deceive—he simply wished to make a point, to win an argument, and to entertain the audience. Chrysostom had nothing but disdain for those sophists of antiquity such as Gorgias, whose speech was intended merely to evoke pleasure in the listener. Chrysostom, no doubt, evoked such pleasure in his audience as well—if the applause against which he protested during his sermons is any indication. For Chrysostom, however, not the brilliance of the sermon but the truth and virtue it communicated were foremost in his mind. His goal was not to entertain his listeners but to transform them into model Christians (as he conceived a model Christian should behave).

Indeed, Chrysostom was simply following the example of his hero Paul, who exhibits a similar approach. Paul told the church in Corinth that he "did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except

24. Frederick Morgan Padelford, *Essays on the Study and Use of Poetry by Plutarch and Basil the Great* (New York: H. Holt, 1902), 105.

25. *In epistolam II ad Thessalonicenses* 1, *PG* 62.472 (*NPNF1* 13.379).

26. Harry Hubbell, in describing Chrysostom's rhetorical style, notes that this use of invective was a common feature of early Christian preaching that was inherited from pagan literature. Hubbell comments, "The most important point of contact with pagan literature was in the diatribe, the instrument of the Cynic, preaching virtue on the street corner, who was the closest approach in purely pagan society to the Christian preacher." Harry M. Hubbell, "Chrysostom and Rhetoric," *Classical Philology* 19, no. 3 (1924): 263.

Jesus Christ and Him crucified."[27] Chrysostom's commentary on this verse is telling, for he uses it as an opportunity to attack what he saw as the baser motives of the sophists, who "indeed have ten thousand things to say, and concerning ten thousand things they speak, winding out long courses of words, framing arguments and syllogisms, compounding sophisms without end. But I came unto you saying no other thing than 'Christ was crucified,' and all of them I out-stripped: which is a sign such as no words can express of the power of Him whom I preach."[28]

Sophist rhetorical techniques were a toolbox that Chrysostom used to achieve the goal of Christian formation. The eloquence of the sophist was a means that he embraced in service of a goal that was absolutely distinct from that of the sophist. The sophist spoke for the applause and the affection of his audience—whether or not the point that engendered this applause was edifying or true was immaterial. This disingenuousness infuriated Chrysostom. So adamant was he on this point that he was forced to admonish his own flock for applauding him, in one instance establishing a rule that "no hearer be permitted to applaud in the midst of any person's discourse, but if he will needs admire, let him admire in silence: there is none to prevent him: and let all his study and eager desire be set upon the receiving the things spoken."[29] The congregation, which was so used to the sophistic environment, reacted in an expected way—they applauded his admonition.[30] Like Stoicism, sophistic oratory was in the atmosphere of fourth-century Antioch, and the Christians of the day, who breathed the same air as Stoics and Sophists, adopted and adapted their methods to suit their particular needs.

4. Libanius

Libanius (314–c. 393) was the preeminent rhetor of his day and one of the most notable practitioners of sophistic rhetoric in fourth-century Antioch. Libanius was a defender of the Greco-Roman religious cult but he nevertheless had several Christians as his students. While historians such as Sozomen and Socrates Scholasticus note that John studied under Libanius, Chrysostom, for his part, never directly identifies the pagan rhetor as his instructor.[31] Similarly, Libanius makes no mention of John as his student.[32] Naturally, this lack of mutual

27. 1 Cor. 2:1-2.

28. *In epistulam I ad Corinthios* 6, *PG* 61.48 (*NPNF1* 12.29).

29. *In Acta apostolorum* 30, *PG* 60.225 (*NPNF1* 11.193).

30. Gregory Nazianzus no doubt recognized the same traits in his flock observing that the faithful in Constantinople wanted "orators not priests" [Οὐ γὰρ ζητοῦσιν ἱερεῖς, ἀλλὰ ῥήτορας]. Gregory Nazianzus, *Supremum vale* (*orat.* 42), *PG* 24.488.

reference has led some to question whether Chrysostom indeed had Libanius as a teacher.[33] Recent scholarship, nonetheless, leans more in support of the position that Chrysostom was in fact a pupil of the great sophist master.[34] While there are no overt references to Libanius in the Chrysostomic corpus, Chrysostom, however, did make indirect references to his "superstitious" mentor.[35]

There are also rhetorical usages present in Chrysostom's work that suggest an association and familiarity with Libanius's style.[36] Libanius, like Chrysostom, was engaged in the art of persuasion and used a variety of rhetorical techniques that were part and parcel of the sophistic method. These techniques included hyperbole [ὑπερβολή], ekphrastic rhetoric [ἔκφρασις], and psogos [ψόγος]. For Chrysostom, the techniques he learned from Libanius (and mastered) were one thing, and the application of those techniques was something entirely different. Chrysostom applied the techniques he learned as a student under Libanius to promote his vision of a virtuous Christian life for the citizens of Antioch.

The dramatic imagery and strong language present throughout Chrysostom's homilies bear witness to the influence of Libanius's sophistic style

31. The church historian Sozomen (400–450) gave one of the principal attestations that Chrysostom studied under Libanius. In his introduction to the early life of Chrysostom, he notes that John "learned rhetoric from Libanius, and philosophy from Andragathius." He also provides the famous deathbed quotation that Libanius is alleged to have made as to who should succeed him. "It would have been John . . . had not the Christians taken him from us." Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, *PG* 67.1513 (*NPNF2* 2.399).

32. Libanius does make reference to a student John who is beginning his career in Constantinople, but this is long before John is spirited away to become the bishop there. Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, 1:22–23.

33. For a discussion on whether or not Chrysostom was in fact a student of Libanius, see Baur's treatment of the subject and his subsequent conclusion that Chrysostom was indeed trained by the famous rhetor.

34. See David Hunter's conclusion that Chrysostom was in fact the student of Libanius, in David G. Hunter, "Libanius and John Chrysostom: New Thoughts on an Old Problem," *Studia Patristica* 22 (1989). Petit, for his part, does not think there is enough information to render a decision. See Paul Petit, *Les étudiants de Libanius* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1956).

35. "Καὶ γὰρ ἐγώ ποτε νέος ἔτι ὤν, τὸν σοφιστὴν τὸν ἐμὸν—πάντων δὲ ἀνδρῶν δεισιδαιμονέστερος ἐκεῖνος ἦν. . . ." *Ad viduam juniorem*, *PG* 47.357(*NPNF1* 9.122). Here, "δεισιδαιμονέστερος" can be rendered as superstition or reverence for the gods. Additionally, Chrysostom's use of τὸν σοφιστὴν clearly indicates the sophistic background of his teacher.

36. For more on the rhetorical similarities between Chrysostom and Libanius, see Ameringer and Jean Dumortier, "La culture profane de saint Jean Chrysostome," *Mélanges de science religieuse* 10 (1953): 53–62.

in general and the use of ekphrastic rhetoric in particular. Such language was especially useful in the encomiastic literary style that Chrysostom embraced in presenting scriptural figures to his congregation. Harry Hubbell succinctly describes the application of encomiastic language in the rhetorical tradition Chrysostom inherited from Libanius. "The virtues of the body are health, strength, and beauty. The virtues of the soul are prudence, temperance, courage, justice, holiness, liberality, and generosity."[37] Consider, for example, Chrysostom's vivid association of hard labor with Abraham to his congregation in one of his homilies on Acts: "But think now what a thing it would be to see a presbyter, the moving picture of Abraham, gray-headed, girded up, digging and working with his own hands? What more pleasant than such a field! Their virtue thrives."[38] Thus Abraham's virtue, according to the encomiastic tradition, was both physical and spiritual. Chrysostom was engaged in a type of rhetorical portraiture of the saints, including Abraham. Margaret Mitchell notes that Chrysostom's vivid, verbal presentations of the saints were offered "within the structures and conventions of ancient rhetoric, which has as its single purpose the imitation of the ἀρχέτυπος εἰκών, the 'archetypal image'."[39]

David Hunter argues not only in support of Socrates Scholasticus' and Sozomen's assertion that Chrysostom was indeed the student of Libanius but also that he was engaged in an ongoing polemic with his former teacher. Libanius was a strong advocate of the Greek pagan religious cult and therefore a supporter of the emperor Julian's attempts to restore and revive it.[40] Hunter maintains that Chrysostom's *Comparatio regis et monachi* is a veiled response to Libanius's *Apologia Socratis*, which was offered in support of Julian's efforts to promote Greek religion and *paideia*.[41] Chrysostom responds to the attacks of pagans like Julian and Libanius by arguing that it is the monk, not the sophist, who is the fulfillment of the Greek philosophical ideal.

That Chrysostom sought to claim the mantle of Greek *paideia* for the Christians is not without significance. Chrysostom had no love for the

37. Hubbell, "Chrysostom and Rhetoric," 264.

38. *In Acta apostolorum* 18, *PG* 60.147 (*NPNF1* 11.118).

39. Margaret M. Mitchell, "The Archetypal Image: John Chrysostom's Portraits of Paul," *The Journal of Religion* 75, no. 1 (1995): 66.

40. Hunter, "Libanius and John Chrysostom: New Thoughts on an Old Problem," 129–35.

41. Within the body of Chrysostom's *Comparatio regis et monachi* there have been discovered several direct quotations from Libanius as well allusions to some of the sophist's previous work. See John Chrysostom, *A Comparison between a King and a Monk. Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life: Two Treatises*, trans. David G. Hunter, vol. 13, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1988), 4–5.

purveyors of Greek philosophy. Nevertheless, he entered into a battle in defense of philosophy against the common enemy, sophism, and its elevation of rhetoric (λόγοι). Chrysostom may have used sophistic rhetoric but he was no sophist. For Chrysostom, the sophists were disingenuous and had no real concern for virtue and, in this regard, Greek philosophy was the lesser of two evils. If Greek philosophy and sophism provided the battleground between Chrysostom and Libanius, then the trophy in their struggle was virtue. The elevation of Christian exemplars was Chrysostom's foremost concern, and he would even extol the philosopher Socrates as a model of virtue if to do so would help achieve his ends against the sophist rhetors.

Therefore, one needs to understand that Chrysostom's homiletical response to Libanius over the proper role of Greek *paedeia* in Antiochene society was, at least in part, an extension of his concern for the establishment of the boundaries of his religious community and for the defense of those boundaries against external interlopers. Thus a great deal of Chrysostom's antipathy toward the sophists can be attributed to their role as the chief defenders of the pagan religious system. For the sophists, as exemplified by Libanius, rhetoric had religious as well as a civic and cultural significance.

Libanius and Chrysostom both operated within and spoke about the same fourth-century Antiochene social and religious environment in which a variety of religious expressions competed for the attention of the local populace. Chrysostom's discrete categories of Greek, Jew, and Christian, however, stood in contrast to Libanius's more pragmatic attitude that viewed religion as a collection of personal religious practices. While Libanius no doubt longed for a return of the Roman civic religion to its place of prominence, he understood the social reality of fourth-century Antioch and advocated a pluralistic approach that accepted the variegated religious milieu of his day. Isabella Sandwell's recent study depicts a religious scene in Antioch that was at once fluid and unformed. Libanius, more so than Chrysostom, was willing to adapt to this situation, realizing that "religious identities were not idealized and monolithic but strategic and practical."[42] Indeed, in this way Chrysostom was much more like Julian than he was like Libanius. Chrysostom, akin to Julian, longed for a unified religious identity albeit an identity that was thoroughly Christian.

Libanius's sophistic method, which wedded religious and civic life with rhetoric, had a profound influence on Chrysostom—one that John acknowledges. In his *De sacredotio*, John describes the financial burden his mother endured in order to educate him.[43] The education derived from his

42. Isabella Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 163.

mother's monetary investment helped form Chrysostom's rhetorical style of persuasion and, perhaps more importantly, his understanding of how that rhetoric could be applied in order to advance his own particular civic and moral ethos.

5. Scriptural Text

The famous *Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates* describes the legend of the translation of the Torah into the Hellenistic Greek of Alexandria by seventy-two Jewish scholars using a base text from Jerusalem. The name *Septuagint* (i.e., of the seventy) is understood to be derived from the approximate number of translators alleged in the *Letter of Aristeas.* Chrysostom, like his contemporaries, accepted this as truth without reservation.[44] It is by no means surprising that the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament was the basis for John Chrysostom's exegetical work. The Alexandrian translation of the Jewish Bible was normative, not only for the Evangelists and Paul, but also for the vast majority of patristic authors writing at Chrysostom's time. However, there are many known recensions of the Septuagint and it is important to identify the one Chrysostom used in his Old Testament exegesis.

Jerome notes in his *Praefatio in Libras Paralipomenon* that there were three different Septuagint text forms available at the time and that the Lucianic recension was the one used by the Antiochene church.[45] Indeed, says Jerome, by the beginning of the fifth century, the Lucianic recension was the de facto Old Testament text in use from Constantinople to Antioch. Therefore, most posit that Chrysostom used the Lucianic recension of the Septuagint. Lucian (240–312) was a presbyter from Antioch. The recension of the Septuagint attributed to him shows a heavy dependence upon Origen's Hexapla.[46] In

43. *De sacredotio* 1.2, *SC* 272.68.

44. In his fourth homily on Genesis, Chrysostom uncritically presents the outline of the formation of the Septuagint text as presented in the *Letter of Aristeas*. *In Genesim* 4, *PG* 53.42–43.

45. "Ad difficultatis autem cumulum accedebat, quod aliae praeterea Graecae editiones, quae ferebantur, multum inter se pro regionum varietate atque usu Ecclesiarum differrent. Alexandria, inquit, et Aegyptus in Septuaginta suis Hesychium laudat auctorem: Constantinopolis usque Antiochiam Luciani martyris exemplaria probat. Mediae inter has provinciae Palaestinos codices legunt, quos ab Origene elaboratos Eusebius et Pamphilus vulgaverunt: totusque orbis hac inter se trifaria varietate compugnat." *PL* 22.75–76.

46. Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, 1:318. Natalio Fernández Marcos similarly notes that the Lucianic recension consists of "corrections towards the Hebrew via the Hexaplaric material, especially Symmachus," and "a stylistic revision towards a more fluent Greek, including a preference of the Attic forms rather than the Hellenistic ones." See Natalio Fernández Marcos, "Some Reflections on the

undertaking his revision, Lucian compared his text with a Hebrew text and, most likely, the Syriac Peshitta.

There is some debate as to whether or not Chrysostom relied on the Lucianic recension as his primary scriptural text, but it rests on shaky foundation.[47] Between the general features of the Lucianic edition of the Septuagint text found throughout Chrysostom's work and the widespread usage of this text in his world, there is no reason to believe that Chrysostom relied upon an Old Testament text that was substantially different. The existence of some variants to this textual tradition within the Chrysostomic corpus does indicate that Chrysostom had access to other versions of the Old Testament. These indications, however, must be balanced by two facts. First, such variants are very much in the minority, and the majority of his scriptural references are Lucianic in nature. Second, one should also keep in mind that a majority of Chrysostom's work was homiletic in nature. Chrysostom was preaching extemporaneously, quoting the scriptural text from memory, and adding various rhetorical modifications to suit the particular needs of the sermon, a reality that makes any effort to precisely identify his scriptural text problematic, to say the least.[48] There is also, however, the possibility that scribes "corrected" the scriptural quotations in order to make them consistent with the scriptural text with which they were familiar.

Chrysostom's knowledge of any language other than Greek was limited and, by his own admission, he had no understanding of Hebrew. Chrysostom was not alone in his ignorance of the original language of the Old Testament. Indeed, in the Antiochene church it is difficult to identify, with any degree of certainty, any exegete who possessed a working knowledge of Hebrew. John's teacher, Diodore of Tarsus, was certainly deficient in this respect and even Theodore of Mopsuestia, who understood Syriac, lacked an understanding of Hebrew.[49]

Antiochian Text of the Septuagint," in *Studien zur Septuaginta—Robert Hanhart zu Ehren* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 224ff.

47. For more on this discussion see Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Boston: Brill, 2000), 223ff. See also Amirav, *Rhetoric and Tradition: John Chrysostom on Noah and the Flood*, 63–67.

48. It was not unusual to have stenographers transcribe speeches given by an orator. Malcolm Heath comments that "such a procedure might have attractions for a teacher who regularly lectures on a subject in which he has developed a certain expertise, and who decides at some point that his lectures (unscripted, but the fruit of extended study, reflection, and rehearsal) were worth publishing." Malcolm Heath, *Menander: A Rhetor in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 260.

49. Dudley Tyng, when discussing Theodore's deficiency in Hebrew, says that, "His incompetence in Hebrew is matched by his blind acceptance usually of whatever Septuagint text lay before him." Dudley

There is, however, some use of the Hebrew language in Chrysostom's Old Testament exegetical work, for Chrysostom, like his Antiochene predecessor Lucian, had access to the Hexapla. Chrysostom thus frequently made reference to the original Hebrew through the second column of Origen's six-column work, which contained the Hebrew text transliterated into Greek characters. Chrysostom, most likely through the Hexapla, at times offered the Hebrew to his congregation using this transliterated form. One example of this type of reference is his quotation of the Hebrew in Psalm 8:6 as "Οὐθασρηοῦ μὰτ μὴ ἐλωείμ."[50] Chrysostom, though he knew no Hebrew, was still an Antiochene with a literal sense of scriptural interpretation in which precision [ἀκρίβεια] meant everything. For John, such precision meant that "no syllable or particle of the contents of Sacred Scripture ought be passed idly by."[51] At times Chrysostom even attempted to offer an exegesis on the meaning of the original Hebrew—an exercise that was often hazardous for him.[52] For example, the subtlety of the Hebrew text at times eluded him, as when he offered an extended commentary on Sarah's laughter at the birth of Isaac, yet failed to mention the connection to Isaac's name in Hebrew.[53] Chrysostom also appears to be unaware of the inconsistencies between the Greek and Hebrew texts. His exegesis of Gen. 22:1 discusses the rendering from the Septuagint text in which God calls Abraham forth saying, "Abraham, Abraham."[54] Chrysostom, however, makes no mention that the Hebrew text has God calling Abraham's name only once.

Chrysostom, notwithstanding his difficulties with the original Hebrew, was not averse to comparing the Hebrew text (albeit most likely from the

Tyng, "Theodore of Mopsuestia as an Interpreter of the Old Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50, no. 4 (1931): 299.

50. *Expositiones in Psalmos*, *PG* 55.116. In his commentary, Chrysostom, in addition to the transliterated Hebrew, references different versions of the Greek scriptural text, stating, "Ἠλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχύ τι παρ' ἀγγέλους. Ἕτερος, Βραχύ τι παρὰ Θεόν. Ἄλλος, Ὀλίγον παρὰ Θεόν." The Hebrew transliteration is meant to contrast the difference between ἀγγέλους and Θεόν by noting the use of ἐλωείμ or אֱלֹהִים in the original. This illustrates that Chrysostom, while relying, in principle, on the Lucianic recension, had access to other text forms.

51. *In Genesim* 42, *PG* 54.387, Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:422.

52. Robert Hill offers a litany of Chrysostom's shortcomings in his attempt to communicate the meaning of the Hebrew original text to his flock. One example is Chrysostom mistaking the transliteration of the Hebrew *zo'em* (God is angry) for the Greek word for life (ζωήν). John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 2 vols. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 1:26–27.

53. *In Genesim* 45, *PG* 54.421.

54. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.429.

Hexapla) with the Greek to help resolve difficult passages. Chrysostom comments on Gen. 24:2 in which he compares the Greek translation with his understanding of the Hebrew, saying, "In Greek the verse is written this way: 'under my thigh'; whereas in the Hebrew it says, 'under my loins.'"[55] Chrysostom's conclusion is that the significance is that "the birth of Isaac takes its origin from there."[56] The implication for Chrysostom was that the Hebrew "under my loins" more directly referred to the procreative aspect of the Abrahamic promise that he would be the father of many nations. Chrysostom, ever the literal interpreter, thus referenced the Hebrew since he considered the Greek "under my thigh" somewhat ambiguous and not helpful to the point he was attempting to make.

John Chrysostom made no claim to understanding Hebrew, but of significance is his repeated reference to the original language despite his inability to understand it.[57] His attempts to exegete the Hebrew must be seen as part of his Antiochene exegetical philosophy, which, at its heart, was concerned with arriving at the *sensus literalis*. While he viewed the Septuagint translation as divinely inspired, his references to the Hebrew original indicate, at the very least, a respect for the mother language of the Old Testament.

6. Pauline Influence

It is indeed an understatement to say that Chrysostom held the Apostle Paul in high regard. Margaret Mitchell begins her recent study on Chrysostom's use of Paul with the famous quote from John's homily in which he states, "I love all the saints, but I love most the blessed Paul."[58] The effusive praise that Chrysostom heaped upon the Apostle Paul was similar to the praise he afforded Abraham or any other prominent scriptural exemplar. John applied the same encomiastic formula to all of his exemplars, in which he offered "praise of his virtues and defense of his 'foibles' against detractors."[59]

55. *In Genesim* 48, *PG* 54.436. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:29.

56. Ibid. Hill, referencing De Montfaucon, notes that Chrysostom's conclusion is similar to that of his teacher, Diodore.

57. Chrysostom at times indicated his ignorance of the original language of the Old Testament text, saying, "Those who have a precise knowledge of the [Hebrew] language say . . ." [Λέγουσι τοίνυν οἱ τὴν γλῶτταν ἐκείνην ἀκριβῶς ἠσκημένοι . . .]. *In Genesim* 4, *PG* 53.43.

58. *In illud: Utinam sustineretis modicum*, *PG* 51.301. Margaret M. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation*, vol. 40, Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

59. Mitchell, "The Archetypal Image: John Chrysostom's Portraits of Paul," 18.

For Chrysostom, Paul was himself an Abrahamic figure. Indeed, in Chrysostom's opinion, Paul was an even greater figure than Abraham. "But what conduct could match that of Paul?" he asks. "He who did not surrender a home—a home and parents—but the world itself because of Jesus, and disdained the sky and even the highest heavens, and sought only one thing: to love Jesus."[60] Whereas Abraham left the land of his father and his idolatrous ways, Paul left behind, not just hearth and kin, but the very world and all that it entailed. Even the great act of faith exhibited by Abraham in his attempted sacrifice of Isaac is nothing compared to Paul, who "offered himself in sacrifice, and so many times."[61] As much as Chrysostom extolled the virtues of Abraham, such hyperbole pales in comparison to that offered by Chrysostom on behalf of Paul. Indeed, the rhetorical device employed by Chrysostom demanded that he show that Paul's virtue exceeded not only that of Abraham but that of *all* the Old Testament patriarchs. Frances Young notes the connection between Paul and Abraham, two heroic figures to whom Chrysostom constantly refers, noting that "Chrysostom sees morality in terms of exemplary deeds not abstract virtues and, whether it is Paul or Abraham, it is to their exemplary character and practice that he draws attention."[62]

The sheer volume of Chrysostom's homilies on the Pauline corpus, over 250, demonstrates its profound hermeneutical influence on Chrysostom. It could hardly have been otherwise. Paul's epistles were frequently read in the liturgical life of the church, and that reality, combined with Chrysostom's intensive and successful efforts to memorize the scriptural text, makes his emphasis on Paul's writings seem only natural. Thus, those epistles (such as Romans) that deal with the figure of the patriarch were particularly influential in his understanding of the person of Abraham. In some ways, then, it can be said that John Chrysostom's theological understanding of Abraham is the Apostle Paul's theological understanding of Abraham.[63]

60. *De laudibus sancti Pauli apostoli* 1, *SC* 300.6.1.

61. Ibid. Ameringer notes that this type of hyperbole, for Abraham or Paul, was part of the sophistic eulogy that required that a hero's traits be "systematically magnified." Ameringer, *The Stylistic Influence of the Second Sophistic on the Panegyrical Sermons of St. John Chrysostom: A Study in Greek Rhetoric*, 40.

62. Frances M. Young, "The Rhetorical Schools and Their Influence on Patristic Exegesis," in *Making of Orthodoxy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 188.

63. Indeed, Chrysostom often used Paul's view of Abraham to buttress his own high opinion of the patriarch, as when he tells his congregation to "listen to what Paul says about Abraham, his obedience, and the faith he showed in everything God said" [ἄκουσον τοῦ Παύλου λέγοντος περὶ τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τῆς ἐκείνου καὶ τῆς ἐν ἅπασι πίστεως]. *De Incomprehensibili dei Natura* 2, *PG* 48.715. John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, trans. Paul W. Harkins, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 84.

Paul's fingerprints can be seen on many of the extended Abrahamic themes to which Chrysostom returns repeatedly in his sermons, such as: Abraham as a man of faith and the father of many nations, the nature of the two covenants, the sign of circumcision, justification by faith, and the superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedek. In addition, Chrysostom often uses Paul as a lens through which he views Abraham as a tool in his rhetorical diatribe directed against Jews and Judaizing Christians. A principal theme of this polemic concerns the inheritance of Abraham. Chrysostom used Pauline language to answer the claim of scriptural Jews in Matt. 3:9 that they have Abraham as their father (a claim that John also ascribes to contemporaneous Jews). Indeed, as Margaret Mitchell notes, Chrysostom no doubt associated himself with Paul and saw in his ministry similarities to Paul's, particularly when it came to the issue of the relationship of the church to the synagogue.[64] Paul's influence on Chrysostom was not so much a question of dogma as it was of pastoral issues and methods.

As Mitchell rightly points out, the fact that Chrysostom viewed and used Paul in this way is itself an indication that Paul's theology was more practical and pastoral than it was systematic and dogmatic.[65] In this, Pauline scholarship appears to have arrived at a very Chrysostomic view of Paul, focusing on the epistolographic and rhetorical aspects of the Pauline corpus.[66] As Mitchell puts it, "As a rhetorically trained, Greek-speaking Syrian (and student of the great 'pagan' orator Libanius), Chrysostom knew intimately well the literary culture in which Paul was situated."[67] Chrysostom's homiletical view of Abraham supports Mitchell's assessment both in John's faithful adherence to the rhetorical style that he learned as a young man and the pastoral focus of his exegesis of the patriarch.

As noted earlier, an aspect of Pauline language that fit cleanly into Chrysostom's rhetorical repertoire was Paul's use of agonistic language and athletic metaphors. Such language was certainly part of Paul's literary style in

64. A variety of pastoral concerns in the Pauline epistles led John to draw the conclusion that Paul was his "soul-mate," including "inner-church conflict, Judaizing Christians, immoral behavior in the congregation, and thorny issues in the relationship between Christians and the larger social order (women, slaves, private property)." Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation*, 40, 68.

65. Ibid., 29.

66. This is an opinion shared by J. N. D. Kelly, who notes that, "The Pauline letters . . . being actual letters, presented him with fewer problems; since he felt an empathy with the apostle, his explanations of them tend to be somewhat more in line with what modern critics look for." Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom, Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop*, 94.

67. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation*, 40, 30.

describing his own struggles and that of the early church. It was also a natural sophistic tool for Chrysostom to utilize in his description of Abraham as the courageous hero struggling not just against earthly enemies but against his own human nature.[68] Such language had a long Antiochene tradition, reaching back even to the first century and the martyred bishop Ignatius.

The Pauline epistles also helped form Chrysostom's attitude toward the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament. In this regard, John departed from his fellow Antiochenes, Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who tended to think of the Old Testament as a closed salvation economy. Such an attitude (especially for Theodore) limited connections between the two scriptural texts.[69] Chrysostom, however, under the influence of Paul, had a profoundly messianic understanding of the Old Testament manifested in a variety of typological associations in his Old Testament exegesis.[70] Such typological associations, however, remained limited, as one might expect given John's Antiochene background.

Paul's language helped form and advance Chrysostom's frequent reference to Abraham—something that will be shown in the following chapters detailing Chrysostom's view of the qualities, pastoral significance, and theological importance of Abraham. In a very practical sense, the sheer extent of Chrysostom's homilies on the Pauline epistles (replete as they are themselves with Abrahamic references) made such commentary on Abraham a necessity. The Pauline nature of Chrysostom's view of Abraham, however, was not confined to his homilies on the Pauline corpus, nor was Chrysostom limited to Paul's examination of Abraham. Paul's treatment of Abraham was the departure point from which Chrysostom expanded his own particular exegetical view.

68. One should not make too much of the similarity of agonistic language in Paul and Chrysostom nor imply that Chrysostom was writing in the style of Paul. Rather, Chrysostom was simply adapting Pauline language that fit neatly into the sophistic style he learned in his youth. See Ameringer, *The Stylistic Influence of the Second Sophistic on the Panegyrical Sermons of St. John Chrysostom: A Study in Greek Rhetoric*, 10.

69. For more on Theodore's strict historical interpretation of the Old Testament, see section eight below.

70. Sten Hidal puts it rather succinctly: John is "not so fascinated by Israel's history as his predecessors are; his main interest is a pastoral one." Sten Hidal, "Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Antiochene School with Its Prevalent Literal and Historical Method," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (until 1300)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 562.

7. Christian Textual Tradition

The fourth century, in which John Chrysostom was born, was a formative period for the Christian community. Under the guidance of many of the most prominent church fathers, the church transitioned from the persecutions of Diocletian at the dawn of the century into the age of official state religion with the Theodosian decree in the century's waning years. For most of the fourth century, the church was an active participant in the Roman religious milieu. The *Edict of Milan* in 313 made Christianity a *religio licita*, and the years that followed saw an explosion in the writings produced by church leaders.[71]

The fourth century was a time of religious competition. While Christianity prospered after Constantine and reached the status of "state religion" under Theodosius, that end was by no means secure at the time of John Chrysostom's birth. The nineteen-month reign of Julian from 361 to 363 was proof enough of this uncertainty. The world of John Chrysostom was one in which followers of the old pagan cults and philosophical traditions competed with Christians for the hearts and minds of the Roman populace. Christians in turn were divided among themselves and their internal disputes constituted, in many ways, the most profound religious struggle of the period. The Christian self-definition also had an external component in the ongoing competition with the Jewish community concerning whether it was the church or the synagogue that was the rightful heir to the faith of Israel.[72]

The hierarchs and teachers of the fourth-century Christian church responded to this religious competition in a familiar way—through the promulgation of texts. As Judith Lieu observes, "Texts play a central part not

71. John Chrysostom saw an evolution in the ever-growing textual tradition of the church, beginning with the illiterate fishermen apostles and reaching fulfillment in his fourth century, when the textual tradition was wedded to the rhetorical art. Nevertheless, the Apostles proved greater than the pagan rhetoricians since it was they, not the pagans, that changed the entire world. Chrysostom comments that "The first [Christians] were ignorant in [letters and rhetoric]; not only were they not trained in rhetoric, but they were even illiterate. Nonetheless, in those very areas where the power of rhetoric seems to be most necessary, they surpassed the most skilled orators, making the orators look worse than uneducated children." *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae* 3.12, *PG* 47.368. Chrysostom, *A Comparison between a King and a Monk. Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life: Two Treatises*, 13, 151.

72. Robert Wilken discusses the challenges associated with describing the early competition between Christians and Jews. As is the case with Chrysostom, it is not always easy to tell whether early Christian apologists were speaking about contemporaneous Jews or about the Jews they encountered in the pages of scripture. On the Jewish side, the paucity of texts from the time period combined with Jewish reticence to identify Christians by name further complicates the task. See Robert L. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 10–11.

just in the documentation of what it meant to be Christian, but in actually shaping Christianity."[73] Christianity and Christians were indeed molded by the texts produced by church fathers throughout the church's first four hundred years. At one level, the writings to which Judith Lieu alludes spoke of Christianity and the church in negative terms—defining what it was not. In these writings, definitive boundaries were established that set the church apart from Greco-Roman and Jewish institutions. At another level, the writings framed Christianity in positive terms—what the faith was and ought to be—describing what Christians should believe and how they should behave and live their lives.

The texts and sermons of Christians were, quite naturally, influenced by the prevailing literary methods of the Greek philosophical world. The major Christian figures of the period were educated in some of the finest educational institutions of the day. Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Diodore of Tarsus were educated in Athens—the preeminent center for learning at the time. John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia studied under the famous rhetor Libanius in Antioch. The techniques that church hierarchs such as these learned were utilized to help shape Christian self-understanding. These hierarchs often defined this self-understanding in contrast with other religious communities.

The early patristic textual tradition was an apologetical defense of the faith of Jesus Christ against external opponents who included Christians with opposing beliefs, defenders of the Greco-Roman religious cult, and adherents to traditional Judaism. In the second century, texts describing the martyrdom of Ignatius and Polycarp are early representatives of a textual tradition that sought to define Christianity in contrast to the Roman state and, by association, the Greco-Roman religious cult. Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* and Melito of Sardis's *Peri Pascha* performed a similar function in contrast to Judaism.

The new age of toleration in the early fourth century created an environment in which church leaders could more freely express and promote their theological understanding of the Christian faith. As the texts expressing these opinions multiplied, so did the instances of dispute over the acceptability and propriety of the theological and exegetical positions contained in them. As these disputes increased, Christian authors reflexively utilized the apologetic methods they had honed over the years against each other.

The religious pluralism and syncretism of the fourth century, along with the growing internal Christian fissures, created a heightened desire to set ever-

73. Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7.

firmer boundaries to Christian self-understanding. Such boundaries are evident after the first great council in 325 when Christians differentiated themselves based on their adherence to or rejection of the Nicene theological formulae. As has been mentioned, however, such differentiation was nothing new. The opening words of the first-century *Didache* state that there are only two ways—the way of life and the way of death.[74] The fourth-century church fully embraced such a bifurcated distinction.

Through their writings and homilies, church leaders like John Chrysostom attempted to make the distinctions as simple as possible. The variety of ancient pagan cults and variegated Jewish sects were collectivized as simply Greeks and Jews. The goal, however, was not so much to make a distinction between Arian, Greek, or Jew as much as it was to draw a boundary between Christian and non-Christian. Such a stark distinction is clearly evident in Chrysostom's sermons in which Jews are accused of being idolatrous Greeks and Christian heretics are accused of being Jews. Isabella Sandwell, noting such language, observes that "Christian writers constructed 'Christianity' from a direct contrast with 'Judaism' and 'paganism' despite the many similarities shared between the religions."[75] As Sandwell rightly notes, such contrasting with other religions was not simply a phenomenon of the fourth century, but is found in the writings of the earliest Christian authors.[76]

Antioch, home to John Chrysostom, was most certainly a prime example of religious pluralism in the Roman world. While Chrysostom was preaching in Antioch, roughly half of the population was Christian, divided between those who adhered to the Nicene formula and those who rejected it. The remainder of the population was comprised of followers of the old Roman pagan religion, on the one hand, and of a sizeable and vibrant Jewish community on the other.[77] With regard to the latter, Chrysostom, like the Christian apologists before him, was faced with the added task of laying claim to a scriptural text and narrative that Jews had historically called their own. In such a religiously diverse

74. *Didache* 1:1.

75. Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch*, 5.

76. Sandwell gives the example of Tertullian who, in his *De Idolatria*, describes "appropriate Christian behavior through comparison with what he defined as idolatry or the behavior of the Gentiles. He argues that the 'servants of god' or the faithful (*fideles*) should not share in any 'dress', 'food', 'rejoicings', or any other aspect of life of the 'Gentiles (*nations*).'" Ibid.

77. It is difficult to ascertain what type of Jewish community resided and worshiped in Antioch. The practices described by John Chrysostom in his homilies do not seem to indicate that it was a community following rabbinic leadership.

environment, Antiochene exegetes, such as Chrysostom, saw a great need to set precise boundaries for the Christian community and its faith.

As much as church leaders sought to define boundaries separating Christians from Greco-Roman and Jewish institutions, both traditions had a profound influence on Christian religious thought. Greek philosophical thought, in particular, affected the manner in which Christian theologians formed their members into faithful Christian believers. The homily and the catechetical discourse were powerful tools that priests and hierarchs such as Chrysostom used to mold their flocks into Christian congregations. One such method employed by Chrysostom and others was the use of paraenesis and protreptic speech, which were methods of exhortation designed to motivate people to follow a particular moral teaching.[78] J. de Waal Dryden explains that "paraenesis seeks to facilitate progress [προκοπή] in moral virtue. Ancient philosophy saw happiness in the *conformity* of one's life with virtue, not in simply a belief in virtue."[79] Thus, early church homilists and catechists used philosophical modes of speech to establish the practical and livable aspects of virtuous Christian behavior for the members of their flock, not as a theoretical goal but as something entirely achievable in this life.

One of the most common methods of defining Christian behavior was to set forth virtuous figures as models worthy of emulation, which was most certainly one aspect of Greek philosophical thought that was profoundly influential on the early church fathers. The patristic tradition, especially that emanating from Alexandria, followed Philo in applying this type of philosophical language to the historic figures of Israel. In the mode of the great Greek philosophers that preceded him, Philo sought to present an eternal truth that was of value to both Jews and Gentiles. Toward this end, Philo made use of the genre of the βίος, or life, in which a politician, literary figure, or philosopher is presented as a model worthy of emulation. In writing his βίοι, Philo took the Platonic notion of God as abstract perfection and the Stoic concept of an earthly ruler who exemplified this perfection and projected them upon figures

78. In contemporary usage there is a tendency to differentiate between paraenesis and protrepsis. Stanley Stowers offers a clear description of the distinctions and states that "protreptic [is a] reference to hortatory literature that calls the audience to a new and different way of life, and paraenesis for advice and exhortation to continue in a certain way of life. The terms however were used this way only sometimes and not consistently in antiquity." Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Library of Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 92.

79. J. de Waal Dryden, *Theology and Ethics in 1 Peter: Paraenetic Strategies for Christian Character Formation*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 23.

such as Abraham and Moses—presenting them as examples of earthly perfection, as models of virtue. Indeed, there is a reflexive quality to virtue and perfection in Philo—to live a life of virtue is to seek perfection.[80]

While Philo's use of the Greek philosophical categories of virtue is certainly representative of the fact that he was writing from a Hellenistic background and for a Hellenistic audience, his language reflects that of later Jewish scriptural writings of the Hellenistic period such as 2–4 Maccabees and the Wisdom of Solomon—texts that "are generally" recognized as being originally written in Greek. Jewish translators of the Torah into Greek avoided the word ἀρετὴ altogether. The reluctance of Jewish translators to use the word ἀρετὴ may because the concept of "virtue" in and of itself is charged with a variety of meanings such as goodness and excellence and connotes actions such as glorious deeds, wonders, and miracles. Plato and Aristotle, for example, enumerated four cardinal virtues: wisdom, prudence, courage, and justice.[81] The Stoics, building on Aristotle's work, conceived of virtue as a life lived according to reason—a task meant for all but most especially for those who desired to be leaders. In the correlated Christian usage, the philosophical categories of virtue were markers used by early Christian writers in the same manner they used the concept of holiness—to describe the personal characteristics of the great patriarchal and prophetic figures of ancient Israel who embodied the individual categories of virtue. This association of personal characteristics with virtuous categories imitated the Stoic sage or *sophos* [φρόνιμος]. Thus for Ambrose (to take the great Latin father as an example), Abraham is a model of justice, Isaac a model of wisdom, and Joseph a model of temperance and strength in resisting temptation.[82] Such images resonated with Ambrose's flock and helped contextualize and communicate the scriptural text to his contemporary audience.

The first-century Roman Stoic philosopher, Musonius Rufus, described virtue as that which was "not simply theoretical knowledge, but . . . practical application as well."[83] He noted that when a king lives a life of virtue he becomes "preeminently godlike and worthy of reverence."[84] Thus being

80. Geljon, *Philonic Exegesis in Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Moysis*, 31–36.

81. Plato, *Republic* 4, ἡ σοφία (428.b.1), ἡ σωφροσύνη (430.d.1), ἡ ἀνδρεία (431.e.10), ἡ δικαιοσύνη (427.e.1).

82. See Marcia L. Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

83. Cora E. Lutz, ed., *Musonius Rufus: "The Roman Socrates"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), 53.

84. Ibid., 63.

virtuous, for the Stoics, made someone a good Roman, and it was the virtue of the great patriarchs and prophets of Israel, for the church fathers, that made them good Israelites. In surveying the personages of the Hebrew scripture, and desiring to present these figures as models to be emulated, Philo and later, Christians, naturally associated the idea of virtue with many of the prominent figures of their respective faiths. Indeed, within the Wisdom of Solomon, the Hellenic influence on the author is readily apparent in the famous verse speaking of virtue, saying, "Or if one loves justice, the fruits of her works are virtues; For she teaches moderation and temperance, justice and fortitude, and nothing in life is more useful for men than these."[85]

Reference to the prominent figures of the Jewish Bible as models of virtue was a point of intersection for both the Jewish philosopher Philo and the early church fathers who read and drew upon his works. The influence of Philo and the allegorical method that he embraced is found most prominently in the Alexandrian exegetes and those influenced by their method—in particular the Cappadocian fathers, of whom Gregory of Nyssa is the foremost example. Gregory's *De Vita Moysis* stands as the preeminent example of this appropriation of Philo.[86] We must not forget, however, that the Antiochene School of interpretation in the East took a more moderate approach in appropriating and applying the concept of the Stoic sage.

8. Antiochene School

Through both the philosophical method and the Antiochene School, Chrysostom inherited the practice of presenting scriptural figures as virtuous models to his congregation. His frequent reference to scriptural figures in general and Old Testament saints in particular clearly shows how much John valued the Christian literary tradition of extolling exemplars. Chrysostom, however, was first and foremost a homilist and a pastor. As Margaret Mitchell puts it, "the orator-exegete always has a contemporary end in view."[87] The virtuous attributes of a scriptural figure such as Abraham could have a myriad of applications, and the same virtue might be used differently depending on the particular circumstance. The virtue of scriptural saints was valuable to Chrysostom only so far as it edified his flock.

85. Wisd. 8:7.

86. Geljon's work on the Philonic exegesis present in Gregory of Nyssa's work clearly demonstrates the influence of Philo on the Cappadocian father.

87. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation*, 40, 22.

One almost always sees the Antiochene School in contrast to its counterpart in Alexandria. The Alexandrian School was a well-established catechetical institution that counted Clement and Origen as its leaders. The "school" in Antioch, however, was never such a well-defined institution. Rather, the Antiochene School represents a *mode* of theological inquiry and scriptural exegesis. The writings of Ignatius of Antioch, for example, demonstrate Antiochene exegetical norms although scholars do not formally recognize him as part of the later Antiochene exegetical tradition.

John Chrysostom was an heir to the Antiochene exegetical tradition and has the distinction of being its only prominent practitioner to escape ecclesial condemnation. The Nestorian controversy of the fifth century, which both contemporaries and subsequent generations of Christians believed emanated from the Antiochene School, led to the eventual anathematization of the principal Antiochene exegetes. That Chrysostom escaped condemnation should not be taken as an indication that the Antiochene School had less than a profound influence on John Chrysostom. Where Libanius taught Chrysostom how to speak, the Antiochene exegetical masters taught him how to think.

A. Early Antiochene Exegetical Tradition

Antioch's importance as a Christian city begins in the scriptural narrative. The Antiochene church, founded by the Apostle Peter, was the place where the followers of Jesus of Nazareth were first called Christians.[88] Within the fourth-century Roman Empire, Antioch was a cosmopolitan city whose prestige was exceeded only by that of Rome and Alexandria. No doubt, the prominence of Antioch within the Roman Empire shaped the consciousness of the city's Christian community, which looked to its Petrine roots with pride. Antioch was also a crossroads community that linked the Western and Eastern halves of the empire. This queen city of the East was home to a religiously diverse population that included a sizeable and vibrant Jewish community.

The theological roots of the Antiochene School originate with Theophilus of Antioch, who was bishop of the city from 169 to 188. In Theophilus's exegesis we see the origins of its trademark literal mode of interpretation. Devoid of typological references, Theophilus's apologetical work demonstrates what Sten Hidal describes as "a peculiar combination of Jewish and Greek influence."[89] After Theophilus, Paul of Samosata (200–275), who was bishop of Antioch in the middle of the third century, continues the tradition. Paul

88. Acts 11:26.

89. Hidal, "Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Antiochene School with Its Prevalent Literal and Historical Method," 544.

was followed by Lucian (c. 240–312), the redactor of the Septuagint text. Both Paul and Lucian shared a common distaste for Origen's allegorical method.[90] Despite Paul's adherence to the Antiochene literal method, Chrysostom had no use for his theology, which he linked to that of Marcion. Paul of Samosata's questioning of the divinity of Christ caused Chrysostom to refer to such teachings as a "disease" [τὰ ἐκείνων νοσοῦντες].[91]

B. Eusebius of Emesa

Eusebius of Emesa (300–359), like Theophilus before him, was influenced by both the Hebrew and the Greek scriptural texts in addition to the Syriac with which he was very familiar.[92] Eusebius encountered Origenistic teaching in his youth, and while he embraced the Alexandrian's scriptural acumen embodied in the Hexaplaric text, he was less enamored with the allegorical methods of its editor. R. B. ter Haar Romeny theorizes that Eusebius of Emesa is "one of the possible historical links between the works of Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea on the one hand, and the Antiochenes on the other."[93] In many ways, this familiarity with Origen has led some to view Eusebius of Emesa as a type of theological bridge between the two schools. In Eusebius, whose writings have only recently been produced in critical editions, the evolution of the Antiochene literal mode of interpretation is unmistakable. Even contemporaries, such as Jerome, noticed this development and traced its path from Eusebius to Diodore to John Chrysostom.[94] It is precisely this exegetical development that is important for the present discussion.

90. Attempts to accurately describe the theological views of either Paul of Samosata or Lucian are fraught with difficulties. The paucity of texts that scholars attributed to Paul and the presence of *two* Christians named Lucian in Antioch cloud our understanding. In light of this difficulty, Richard Hanson describes attempts to accurately discern Lucian of Antioch's doctrinal theology as "indulging in fantasy." See R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318–381*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 83.

91. *Homilias in Joannem* 48, *PG* 59.269.

92. Romeny believes that Eusebius had a limited, grammatical understanding of Hebrew but it is unlikely that he knew much beyond that. Nevertheless, Eusebius recognized the importance of the Hebrew original to resolve difficult passages in the Septuagint translations, which he approached through his knowledge of Syriac—a language much closer to the original than the Septuagint Greek. See R. B. ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress: The Use of Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac Biblical Texts in Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis*, Traditio Exegetica Graeca (Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 58–59.

93. Ibid., 8. The church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, is known to have had a fondness for the thought of Origen.

94. "Joannes Antiochenae Ecclesiae presbyter, Eusebii Emiseni Diodorique sectator, multa componere dicitur, de quibus περὶ ἱερωσύνης tantum legi." *PL* 23.713.

Eusebius was in pursuit of the original meaning of the scriptural text and was not hesitant to consider other versions of the text to help resolve difficult passages. Eusebius used the Syriac Peshitta to resolve such difficulties. However, he also referred to the Hebrew text and the Targumim to accomplish the same goal. Eusebius, unlike Ephrem the Syrian, was much more hesitant to depart from the literal reading of the text. It was this fidelity to the original scriptural text that was his most significant contribution to the Antiochene mode of scriptural exegesis. The writings of Eusebius of Emesa represent the earliest extant exegetical corpus of the Antiochenes presently available in any type of substantive quantity. From the limited writings we possess of Eusebius, we can see that the Bishop of Emesa was less an innovator in the literal mode of exegesis than he was a refiner of his received tradition. The Antiochenes that followed continued Eusebius's fidelity to the scriptural text, his rejection of allegorical interpretation, and his desire to hearken back to the original text.

Other Antiochenes disagreed, however, on what was the original text. For John Chrysostom among others (such as Theodore of Mopsuestia), the Septuagint text represented the original, not the Hebrew. Some exegetes viewed texts such as the Peshitta and the Targumim with suspicion and consistently affirmed the preeminence of the Septuagint text in spite of various problems brought about by the vagaries of translation. Nevertheless, Eusebius's main contribution to the Antiochene School was his emphasis on the historical sense of the text.

C. Diodore of Tarsus

As influential as the preceding exegetes were for the development of the Antiochene School, most scholars recognize Diodore of Tarsus (d. 394) as the father of Antiochene exegesis in its final form. Diodore studied in Athens when the Cappadocians, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory Nazianzus, were there along with the future emperor Julian. In his day, Diodore was a strong voice against the Roman pagan religion, as attested to by no less a witness than his former schoolmate Julian, who wrote about the Antiochene's distaste for the ancient religious order. Julian was so angered by Diodore's criticism of the Greco-Roman religion that he mocked the ascetical appearance of the Antiochene preacher as a curse emanating from the gods of Olympus. Diodore was also a preeminent defender of Nicene Christianity, as attested by the Emperor Valens in his turn, who exiled him to Armenia in 372. The orthodoxy of Diodore, at least in the eyes of the fourth-century church, is evident from his prominent role at the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381. After his death, however, through the efforts of Cyril of Alexandria and

others, the bishops in attendance at the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus (431) condemned Diodore because of Nestorius's historical connection to the Antiochene father.[95]

While Diodore was alive, however, his contemporaries regarded him highly, such as the aforementioned Basil of Caesarea with whom he regularly corresponded and to whom he even sent some of his works for review.[96] In Antioch, Diodore was the head of an ascetical school (ἀσκητήριον) where he instructed, among others, John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia.[97] Diodore's friendship with Basil offered Chrysostom, and other students, access to a broader range of theological and exegetical influences. It is indeed apparent that Chrysostom was familiar not only with Basil's work but also with that of the other Cappadocian fathers. Nevertheless, Chrysostom's principal exegetical influence was Diodore himself, and his admiration for his teacher is clearly evident in the panegyric he addressed to Diodore in 392.[98] The mode of exegesis practiced by Diodore, like that of the Antiochene exegetes before him, had as its goal [σκοπός] the *sensus literalis* of the scriptural text.

The recent publication of a commentary on the Psalms attributed to Diodore has helped explain Diodore's exegetical mindset[99]—especially in light of the paucity of surviving texts, many of which were lost as a result of his condemnation.[100] In the prologue to Psalm 118, Diodore describes his method of interpretation as one in which he first determined the historical sense of the scriptural reading [ἱστορία] by defining the goal of the text within the historical

95. Cyril of Alexandria, *Fragmenta ex libro contra Diodorum Tarsensem*, 492.3. Diodore's condemnation came at a local council in Constantinople in 499 and by association in the so-called *Three Chapters* controversy of the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553.

96. Basil, *Epistulae*, *PG* 135.1. For more on Diodore's correspondence with Basil, see Richard Lim, "The Politics of Interpretation in Basil of Caesarea's 'Hexaemeron,'" *Vigiliae Christianae* 44, no. 4 (1990).

97. Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.3, *PG* 67.66. Lucian had a form of catechetical school in Antioch before Diodore, but unlike the Alexandrians there was no connection between the schools of different catechetical masters. While Diodore received the tradition from his predecessors, he is nevertheless what Jean-Marie Olivier calls the Antiochene School's "véritable fondateur." Diodore, *Commentarii in Psalmos*, trans. Jean-Marie Olivier, Commentarii in Psalmos (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1980), ciii.

98. *Laus Diodori episcopi*, *PG* 52.761–65.

99. Jean-Marie Olivier believes the commentary on the Psalms is an authentic work of Diodore. See Diodore, *Commentarii in Psalmos*. Robert Hill concurs with Olivier's assessment noting that the work is "thoroughly Antiochene." Diodore, *Diodore of Tarsus: Commentary on Psalms 1–51*, trans. Robert C. Hill, Writings from the Greco-Roman World (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), xiii.

100. Although most of his writings have been lost, the record shows that Diodore was a prolific exegete, authoring commentaries on the Pentateuch and much of the Old Testament as well as commentaries on the four Gospels, the Book of Acts, and the Pauline and Johannine epistles. See Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, 1:93.

context [ὑπόθεση]. The next exegetical move is from the historical sense to the deeper meaning of the text [θεωρία]. The deeper meaning can never contradict the historical but rather is linked to the historical and helps explain it. Whereas the Alexandrians saw allegory [ἀλληγορία] as the path that led to the deeper meaning of the text, the Antiochenes, rooted as they were in the historical sense of the text, sought a higher level [ἀναγωγή] but never abolished the literal meaning. The result was a highly typological approach with "a tendency to regard the OT as a closed salvation economy, a tendency strengthened by their rhetorical skill."[101] Therefore the *theoria* of the Antiochenes acted as a pointer to the types [τύποι] found elsewhere in scripture. Thus there could be a "higher meaning" for Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah but only in the context of the New Testament self-sacrifice of Christ at Golgotha and with limited (and obvious) typological associations (e.g., Isaac who carried the wood to his sacrifice and Christ who carried the Cross). Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and other Alexandrian exegetes presented a more elaborate allegorical system in which the three days represent the Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian covenants and the two servants who are sent away represent the Jewish sects that did not accept Christ.[102]

The Antiochenes, therefore, referred to an allegorical approach but not in the way the Alexandrians did. As Frances Margaret Young explains, Diodore and other Antiochenes "used the standard literary techniques in use in the rhetorical schools to protest against the esoteric philosophical deductions being made in what they regarded as an arbitrary way."[103] Diodore's commentary is significant because in it he articulates these differences.[104] Indeed, Diodore is painfully clear in defining the Antiochene mode of scriptural exegesis, stating, "We far prefer τὸ ἱστορικόν to τὸ ἀλληγορικόν."[105] Chrysostom inherited both Diodore's preference for precision and his reservations about the allegorical

101. Hidal, "Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Antiochene School with Its Prevalent Literal and Historical Method," 549.

102. John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature; v 4: H, I, J* (New York: Harper, 1872), 669.

103. Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 182.

104. In the prologue to his commentary on Psalm 1, Diodore states his intent to differentiate between the Antiochene approach and that of the allegorists, saying, "Nonetheless, as far as possible we shall with God's grace give a commentary also on the erroneous parts without avoiding the actual reality; instead we shall treat of it historically and literally and not stand in the way of a spiritual and more elevated insight. The historical sense is, in fact, not in opposition to the more elevated sense; on the contrary, it proves to be the basis and foundation of the more elevated meanings." Diodore, *Diodore of Tarsus: Commentary on Psalms 1–51*, 4.

method, stating that allegory is only appropriate when the scriptural text explains the allegory, and that otherwise those who like to allegorize (like the Alexandrians) will "wander aimlessly being carried everywhere . . . with an unbridled desire."[106]

Chrysostom applied Diodore's exegetical method to his pastoral environment using the sophistic rhetorical techniques he had learned from Libanius. The *theoria* for John was a deeper moral lesson linked to the historical and literal meaning of the text. For Chrysostom, the historical context of scripture spoke to the contemporary context, which one can see in his sermons on wealth and poverty and the benefits of monasticism. As Sten Hidal comments, this application of scripture to the contemporary Christian's everyday life was intrinsic to Diodore's literal exegesis in which he "set forth the *historia* or literal sense of the text without giving up what was regarded as central in all exegesis: to expound the usefulness of the Bible in the Christian life."[107]

D. Theodore of Mopsuestia

The life and background of Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428) parallels that of John Chrysostom.[108] Together with John, Theodore studied under both Libanius and Diodore. Unlike Chrysostom, Theodore departed from the ascetical life into which both he and John had been initiated in order to pursue a secular life as a lawyer. John Chrysostom, however, wrote a letter to his schoolmate Theodore and beckoned him back to the monastic life.[109] Like his teacher Diodore, Theodore was highly regarded in his day but fell under anathema years later.[110] Theodore's fall from grace and condemnation

105. Diodore's dictum is from a fragment of his commentary on the Octateuch as quoted in Theodore, *Commentary on Psalms 1-81*, trans. Robert C. Hill, Writings from the Greco-Roman World (Boston: Brill, 2006), xxx.

106. *In Isaiam* 5, *PG* 59.60. Chrysostom states that this approach to allegory is the rule of scripture, itself. "Καὶ πανταχοῦ τῆς Γραφῆς οὗτος ὁ νόμος, ἐπειδὰν ἀλληγορῇ, λέγειν καὶ τῆς ἀλληγορίας τὴν ἑρμηνείαν, ὥστε μὴ ἁπλῶς, μηδὲ ὡς ἔτυχε τὴν ἀκόλαστον ἐπιθυμίαν τῶν ἀλληγορεῖν βουλομένων πλανᾶσθαι καὶ πανταχοῦ φέρεσθαι."

107. Hidal, "Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Antiochene School with Its Prevalent Literal and Historical Method," 550.

108. The life of Theodore of Mopsuestia is detailed in Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.3 (*PG* 67.665).

109. *Ad Theodorum lapsum*, *PG* 47.277–308.

110. Once again, it was Cyril of Alexandria, the opponent of Nestorius, who played the part of antagonist. His argument against the theology of both Diodore and Theodore is found in Cyril's *Contra Diodorum et Theodorum*, *PG* 57.1437–52.

at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553 was, in no small measure, a result of his association with his student Nestorius, who questioned the use of the term Θεοτόκος. Also like Diodore, very little remains of Theodore's writings even though he wrote prolifically on nearly the entire canon of scripture. The Nestorian church, however, regards Theodore as "the blessed interpreter" and has preserved some of his writings, which are predominately in Syriac and Latin.[111]

Theodore, as with the other Antiochene exegetes, did not know the Hebrew language. Like the other Antiochenes, though, Theodore's desire to get at the literal and historical sense of the text caused him to venture into Hebrew linguistics, and he occasionally used the Hexaplar transliterated form in order to help prove a point. As with all of the Antiochenes, he offered apologies for his lack of Hebrew. His first rule was that the Septuagint translation was not simply adequate but in many respects superior to working with the Hebrew original. The second rule was that logic could be used to explain idiomatic usages and grammatical inconsistencies in the text [ἀκολουθία].

Unlike John Chrysostom who, like Diodore, embraced typological associations explaining the Old Testament in terms of the New Testament narrative, Theodore was more hesitant to make such connections. This reticence led Theodoret of Cyrrhus to conclude that Theodore's exegesis "represents a case rather for Jews than for the household of faith."[112] Theodore resisted such typological accommodations as part of his overall exegetical style, which favored ἀκρίβεια over θεωρία. Such precision, combined with the appraisal of his fellow Antiochene, Theodoret, prompted some during his day and after to accuse Theodore of Judaizing tendencies. Indeed, it was not uncommon for opponents of the Antiochenes, such as those more inclined to the Alexandrian mode of exegesis, to label all Antiochene exegetes as Judaizers. Notwithstanding the fact that many contemporaneous Jews were equally deficient in their knowledge of Hebrew, the Antiochene exegetes' collective lack of Hebrew skills militates against such an assessment. What is rather more likely is that the Hellenistic and Jewish thought patterns that permeated the air throughout the first four centuries of Christianity influenced the Antiochene exegetes in a variety of ways. Exegetes like Theodoret, Chrysostom, Diodore, and others simply drew upon these various streams of thought in ways that suited their own personal attributes and circumstances. In the following

111. In the *Patrologia Graeca*, the only work attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia in Greek is his commentary on the Twelve Minor Prophets (*PG* 66.123–632).

112. Theodoret, *Interpretatio in Psalmos*, *PG* 80.860. Theodore, *Commentary on Psalms 1–81*, xxx.

chapters we will see how these various literary, rhetorical, and exegetical forces helped form John Chrysostom's view of the patriarch Abraham.

9. Conclusion

The literary, rhetorical, and exegetical norms that Chrysostom inherited help explain the way in which John presented Abraham to his Christian congregation. John was a product of fourth-century Roman society in a complete sense and one can see the influence of that society, both Christian and non-Christian, in his homilies and discourses. As J. N. D. Kelly so aptly puts it, Chrysostom's "treatises and sermons alike give proof, abundantly although sometimes underrated in the past, that he was thoroughly familiar with, and prepared to exploit as the occasion demanded, all the oratorical and stylistic devices which often appear artificial to modern taste but which were strenuously inculcated in the fourth-century schools of rhetoric."[113]

The Stoic emphasis on virtue and use of exemplars to promote that virtue was common to fourth-century discourse whether or not the orator identified himself as an adherent to Stoic philosophy. Indeed, so profound was the prevalence of Stoic language and usages that the Apostle Paul made use of them in his writings. Libanius looked to the Homeric heroes and the exemplars of antiquity for Stoic virtue whereas Chrysostom referred to the scriptural text in which he found figures such as Abraham, Moses, and Job. Chrysostom saw Stoic qualities in Abraham and amplified these qualities so that his congregation, familiar with the categories of virtue, could easily identify the relevance of the patriarch in their daily lives.

Chrysostom clothed the Stoic qualities of his virtuous figures with sophistic rhetoric. Sophistic rhetoric was the accepted method of discourse, and John was well equipped to compete in the marketplace of ideas through his training in such discourse under the famous Libanius. Chrysostom found the antiquity of Old Testament figures such as Abraham attractive and well suited to the sophistic style that valued historical figures as models of virtue. The praise and invective of sophistic discourse was cause for entertainment, but Chrysostom was more concerned with the moral rectitude and catechesis of his flock than he was with their amusement. Chrysostom lived in a fourth-century Antiochene social and religious environment that had undergone significant change in the preceding decades. While the rhetoric of praise was a useful tool to extol virtue, the practice of diatribe was just as valuable to condemn opposing points of view.

113. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom, Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop*, 8.

Libanius and Chrysostom employed common methods but their source materials were very different. The scriptural text in general and the Old Testament text in particular may have seemed incompatible with the classical methods that influenced Chrysostom, but he nevertheless saw a way that the methods in which he was educated could be applied through the narrative and the prominent figures of that narrative. John was faithful to the Pauline interpretation that preceded him but applied his own particular rhetorical flourish to make his exposition on Abraham unique. As we will see, in many ways, Paul's exposition on Abraham was a departure point from which he explored various pastoral and theological concerns.

The type of exploration in which John was engaged was part of the rapid growth of the Christian textual tradition in the fourth century. The size of Chrysostom's homiletical corpus is a testimony to this rapid growth. Christians actively defined who they were and who they were not. John's oratorical expositions on virtue and boundaries were part of a tradition that originated in apostolic times but later exploded in the new age of toleration that was the fourth century. Chrysostom used the sophistic techniques he learned from Libanius and his source scriptural material to describe Christian virtue in a highly specific way. The use of an exemplar (albeit one taken from a scriptural text) was fully consistent with the classical usages that Chrysostom inherited. Indeed, Gregory of Nyssa's use of Moses for such a presentation bears witness to an approach that the Jewish philosopher Philo also embraced.

The Antiochene method in which Chrysostom was formed as a neophyte Christian taught that the scriptural text had an inner, moral meaning that was visible if the exegete simply looked deep enough. John, following the Antiochene line, had no use for allegorical and spiritual excursions into the scriptural text. For Chrysostom, there needed to be a practical, pastoral application for his exegesis, and his presentation of a scriptural figure such as Abraham needed to be relevant to the daily lives of his flock. To be sure, there was often a higher, typological meaning to the text, but the principal focus was the historical and literal meaning of any given passage and its contemporaneous application. For Chrysostom, he and the members of his congregation were participants in the same historical story as that of Abraham. It was this literal interpretation of a scriptural text that led John to argue that the Christians to whom he preached were the true inheritors of the Abrahamic covenant.

2

Abraham's Virtue

1. Introduction

In classical thought, virtue was not an abstract concept but was rather an identifiable and quantifiable human characteristic that was defined by discrete categories. The Christian theological or Pauline virtues expanded upon the classical categories without displacing them. Sophistic oratory was used by pre-Christian orators to transform their students through the use of an exemplary model that proved that such virtue was indeed attainable. These orators offered an encomium of praise the goal of which was to urge the listener to emulate the subject of the encomium in an effort to emulate the virtue of the subject of praise. Just as virtue had defined categories, so too did the encomium possess a set of prescribed criteria used to describe such virtue.

John Chrysostom's presentation of Abraham was consistent with the encomiastic style of the age and as such was bound by the conventions of the rhetorical methods he inherited. The principal goal of his encomium was to praise the virtue of the patriarch with the hope of inspiring the members of his congregation to imitate that virtue. The classical encomium maintained strict conventions with which to describe such virtue, and Chrysostom did his best to fulfill the requirements of the style by taking Abraham's qualities, as presented in scripture, and associating them with the categories of virtue used by orators from antiquity.

The task of presenting Chrysostom as a model of virtue was made easier by Abraham's inherent qualities as described in the Genesis narratives. These presented an abundance of material well suited to the classical categories of virtue. Where needed, however, Chrysostom massaged the scriptural descriptions of the patriarch—exaggerating positive qualities, minimizing weaknesses, and filling in features that may have been absent from the narrative—in order to paint a complete picture of Abraham as both a true, classical man of virtue and a Christianized figure worthy of emulation. The

picture of Abraham that appeared on the canvas of Chrysostom's homilies was that of the heroic exemplar who possessed a virtuous body and soul, overcame obstacles, and emerged victorious to earn the crown of glory he richly deserved.

Chrysostom, although schooled in the classical methods, was still a Christian homilist, and he married the Pauline or theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity with their classical counterparts to create an image of virtue that was both that of a Stoic sage and a Christian saint. Certainly Chrysostom was not a pioneer in merging classical virtue with Pauline virtue. Other fathers, also conversant with the Greco-Roman educational system, made a similar rhetorical move. Each father, however, had a particular style and method and used them to address their own particular concerns. Chrysostom's presentation of Abraham as a model of virtue, therefore, reflects the ways in which he felt the patriarch served as an antidote to the spiritual weaknesses of his Christian community.

In the following discussion I will present Chrysostom's association of the classical and Pauline categories of virtue with the figure of Abraham. These associations demonstrate that Chrysostom was engaged in a conscious attempt to create an encomium of the patriarch. Chrysostom's homiletical style, however, results in an encomium to Abraham that is dispersed throughout the corpus of his works. Chrysostom's goal was to establish the credentials of Abraham as a saint worthy of emulation. Once he established these credentials, Chrysostom was free to use Abraham as one of his pastoral and pedagogical tools with which he ultimately hoped to transform, not simply individual Christians, but also Christian households, and in turn to reconstruct the social fabric of the cities in which he lived and preached.

2. Model of Classical Virtue

The goal of Chrysostom's rhetoric and scriptural exegesis was to transform his congregation from Roman citizens into Christians. Christ, in the eyes of the church, had a paradigmatic function as the "New Adam" whose mission was to restore the once-fallen image [εἰκόνα] of humanity. The high Christology defined in Nicaea and Constantinople and to which Chrysostom subscribed, however, made living a "Christ-like" life problematic for the members of his flock—many of whom were recent converts to the church. For Chrysostom, the saints of scripture offered a more immediate means of communicating what a Christ-like life was really like since they were unencumbered by the divine nature. One such prominent example from the New Testament is the Apostle Paul. Chrysostom often turned to the Apostle Paul as a pedagogical means of achieving this end. Chrysostom was acutely aware that his flock had to believe

that living a Christian life was indeed possible, and the story of Paul's life was well suited to the encomiastic style that John embraced.[1]

The Old Testament provided a variety of additional personages that could and did provide a similar function for Chrysostom. One could argue, however, that among the many exemplars of the Old Testament, Abraham had a special place in the works of Chrysostom, not only because of the numerous references to the patriarch but also because of their richness. Chrysostom utilized the fullness of the encomiastic style to describe Abraham's bodily and spiritual virtue and his embodiment of classical and Pauline virtue. As Daniélou astutely noted, "unlike Noah or Isaac, the importance of Abraham in the Christian tradition is not typological, but moral and historical."[2]

Unlike Paul, Abraham and other Old Testament figures had achieved a Christ-like life before Christ arrived. Chrysostom asks, "What priest did Abraham have at his disposal? Tell me. Which teachers? What lesson? What encouragement, what advice? There were no written documents, no law, nor prophets, nor anything like it."[3] If Abraham could attain such virtue, without the example of Christ, Paul, or even Chrysostom, for that matter, it should therefore be far easier for the Christians of Antioch.

Using the rhetorical devices at his disposal, Chrysostom painted a verbal icon of Abraham, creating what Margaret Mitchell called "a living encounter" between the listener and the subject that led to "deeper emulation of that model of virtue."[4] This encounter was not a scattershot listing of the positive qualities of an exemplar but rather a carefully crafted portrait rooted in the encomiastic and ekphrastic style of the day that Chrysostom learned from Libanius.[5] What emerged from this portrait was a living, breathing model of virtue that Chrysostom contextualized to fourth-century Antioch as a fellow Christian to be emulated.[6] Such speech was part of the epideictic rhetorical form

1. In 1 Cor. 4:16, Paul himself challenged his flock to imitate him as he was also of Christ [καθὼς κἀγὼ Χριστοῦ]. See also 1 Cor. 11:1. Chrysostom states that this statement was not "self-exultation by Paul" but rather an indication that "virtue is an easy thing." *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 13, *PG* 61.110 (*NPNF1* 12.74).

2. "Ainsi à l'inverse de Noë ou d'Isaac, l'importance d'Abraham dans la tradition chrétienne n'est pas typologique, mais morale et historique." Jean Daniélou, "Abraham dans la tradition chrétienne," *Cahiers Sioniens* 5 (1951): 173.

3. *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt*, *SC* 79.13.

4. Margaret M. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation*, vol. 40, Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 103.

5. The rhetorical schools educated their students through the use of *progymnasmata* [προγυμνάσματα], a set of rhetorical exercises of speech. Rhetorical teachers, like Libanius, prepared their own oratorical examples of praise or invective with which they taught their students.

of ceremonial speech designed to praise (in the form of an encomium) or to blame (in the form of an invective) an individual. With regard to the former, the encomium was the end product in which the orator identified various characteristics of the figure such as physical and social attributes as markers of exceptional virtue. Chrysostom's fidelity to the sophistic method is clearly visible in the way he faithfully fulfills the requirements of epideictic oratory.[7]

The sophist, Theon, identified three principal categories that described the goodness [ἀγαθά] of a virtuous figure: the virtues of the body [τοῦ σώματος], the virtues of the soul [τῆς ψυχῆς], and inherited blessings such as birth, nobility, education, and wealth.[8] As noted in the first chapter, the antiquity of a figure was also seen as a positive attribute in the sophistic method. Apart from Noah, there was no other major figure from scripture that possessed such antiquity. Indeed, Abraham was even more useful to Chrysostom than Noah since, as the father of many nations, he spoke more directly to the universalistic claims of Christianity.

The encomiastic style embraced by Chrysostom and its associated categories were the containers into which he placed the particular features of Abraham's virtue.[9] Features of Abraham's life were therefore described within the context of the categories of virtue and explained within the general parameters of the rhetorical style. The exemplar thus became a universal touchstone upon which Chrysostom repeatedly relied for a variety of pastoral and theological applications.[10] The following analysis of Chrysostom's use of epideictic categories and language in his homiletical references to Abraham shows that John crafted a general encomium to the Old Testament patriarch.

6. Ruth Webb notes that the language of ekphrasis drew upon the social context of the speaker and audience. As a result, "the orator uses his own visual resources to call up images which already exist in the audience's mind." Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 110.

7. The development of epideictic oratory can be traced from figures such as Menander in the third century BCE to rhetors like Chrysostom's teacher Libanius in the fourth century CE. For more on the roots of the method, see Malcolm Heath, *Menander: A Rhetor in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

8. Harry M. Hubbell, "Chrysostom and Rhetoric," *Classical Philology* 19, no. 3 (1924): 264. Averil Cameron notes how Christians were "drawn to a form for spiritual biography" since they "perceived the world in terms of the human body and soul." Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 57.

9. See Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1966).

10. I shall address these pastoral applications more fully in the third chapter of this work.

This encomium, however, was not contained in a single homily or discourse but was rather spread across the breadth of his literary corpus. What emerges is a rather holistic Second Sophistic treatment of an exemplar that incorporated all of the principal features of that genre but which John presented to his congregation in small doses as demanded by the pastoral needs of particular homilies. Chrysostom thus presented Abraham's virtue in a discrete fashion in order to achieve targeted pastoral aims, while slowly building the virtuous credentials of his scriptural exemplar.

A. Virtues of the Body

The sophistic attributes of the virtuous body are health [ὑγίεια], strength [ἰσχύς], and beauty [κάλλος]. As Averil Cameron rightly notes, "the language of the physical body had always been prominent in Christian writing," and Chrysostom's description of prominent scriptural figures certainly demonstrates the use of such language.[11] Chrysostom, using physiognomic descriptions that were part of epideictic rhetoric, created an image of Abraham that clearly portrayed the aged patriarch possessing these sophistic physical characteristics. God fashioned Abraham's body, according to Chrysostom, "as if he had made him so out of stones."[12] Chrysostom described Abraham's strength to be like that of plants that "are injured neither by rains, nor by hailstorms, nor by gusts of wind, nor by any other vicissitude of the sort, but stand naked in defiance of them all, and needing neither wall nor fence to protect them."[13] In the same homily on Ephesians, Chrysostom sets out to place Abraham within the epideictic categories of virtue by extolling the health and strength of his body. "What sort of body is a strong one? [ποῖον σῶμα ἰσχυρόν ἐστιν]," he asks. "Is it not that which is in health [ὑγιαῖνον], and which is overcome neither by hunger nor repletion, nor by cold, nor by heat; or is it that which in view of all these things, needs both caterers, and weavers, and hunters, and physicians, to give it health?"[14]

In these bodily descriptions of Abraham, Chrysostom clearly made use of ekphrastic speech as part of an encomium that associates bodily virtue with lists of associated subjects. These subjects can include events, persons, and seasons. Chrysostom's description of Abraham's physical strength being like that of plants suggests the potential influence of the sophist rhetorician Aphthonius of Antioch who was a contemporary of John Chrysostom and a student of

11. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*, 71.

12. *In Matthaeum* 11, *PG* 57.194 (*NPNF1* 10.66).

13. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 21, *PG* 62.153 (*NPNF1* 13.156).

14. Ibid.

Libanius.[15] The use of plants as a subject of ekphrasis is something Ruth Webb calls a "puzzling addition" and unique to Aphthonius's style.[16] Chrysostom's use of such ekphrastic models indicates both his familiarity with sophistic rhetoric in general and his association with the techniques that emanated from the school of Libanius in particular.

The strength of Abraham's body portrayed by Chrysostom does not imply that John was oblivious to the effects of age on the patriarch. John's homilies could be as explicit in describing the ravages of age as they were in commending the virtues of Abraham's body. "Abraham was then an old man and, because of his age, he was no more than a corpse unable to procreate."[17] The deficiencies of Abraham's body made the virtue required to overcome them that much greater. Chrysostom nevertheless extolled the bodily virtue of Abraham despite his advanced age. Certainly such physical vigor and strength served Chrysostom well in his pastoral presentation of Abraham as a leader of his people and father of many nations, not only in the scriptural sense but also in terms of the classical categories in which he had been trained and with which his audience was familiar.

Abraham was the model philanthropist who gave "together with his goods . . . also the service of his body, and this at such an advanced age."[18] In keeping with this virtue, Chrysostom contends that Abraham's wealth was not derived from commerce or trading but rather through the bodily exertion of "working the soil" [πρὸς ἐργασίαν γῆς].[19] E. G. Clark observes that "Christian ascetics praised the discipline of routine physical work," and thus menial, bodily labor that someone like Aristotle looked down upon as a sign of ignorance was transformed into a sign of virtue.[20]

Chrysostom consistently associated physical strength as a key attribute of Abraham's endeavors. The activity of the *akedah* even caused Chrysostom

15. In his *Progymnasmata*, Aphthonius mentions that the ekphrastic subjects in an encomium can consist of persons and things, seasons and places, dumb animals and also plants" ['Εγκωμιαστέον δὲ πρόσωπά τε καὶ πράγματα, καιρούς τε καὶ τόπους, ἄλογα ζῷα καὶ πρὸς τούτοις φυτά]. Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 10.21.

16. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*, 79.

17. *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt*, *SC* 79.10.1.

18. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 34, *PG* 61.294 (*NPNF1* 12.207).

19. *Commentarius in Job*, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 35.6. John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentaries on the Sages: Commentary on Proverbs and Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), 19.

20. E. G. Clark, "Pastoral Care: Town and Country in Late-Antiquity Preaching," in *Urban Centers and Roral Contexts in Late Antiquity*, ed. Thomas S. Burns and John W. Eadie (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 276–77.

to openly question how Abraham possessed the strength to build the altar and to pile the wood [πῶς ἠδυνήθη τὸ θυσιαστήριον οἰκοδομῆσαι, πῶς ἴσχυσε, πῶς οὐ διελύθη ὑπὸ τῆς ἀγωνίας].[21] The application of the sophistic attributes of the virtuous body, as articulated by Theon, had to be adapted to the particularities of the subject in question. Abraham's age was certainly one particularity that Chrysostom had to address as he sought to describe the patriarch's virtue in physical terms.

For Chrysostom, there was a synergy between the virtue of Abraham's body and the virtue of his soul. The strength of Abraham's soul compensated for any physical weakness he might have had as a result of his age. Indeed, in order for Abraham to succeed, having "both vigor *and* a lofty soul" [δυνάμεως χρεία καὶ ψυχῆς ὑψηλῆς] were "necessary."[22] Therefore, although "nature and age were driving Abraham to despair . . . faith was holding out to him hope of success."[23] Abraham's faith vivified and fortified Abraham's body and allowed him to overcome the ravages of age and stand as a "victor" in a struggle that was at once physical and spiritual. Moreover, stating that the aged patriarch had a "vigorous soul" and a "soul of adamant" that allowed him to obey God's commands both physically and spiritually imbued Abraham's spiritual qualities with physical characteristics.[24] Chrysostom makes such an association between the virtue of the body and that of the soul when he extols the aged patriarch's response to the arrival of the angelic visitors at Mamre, exclaiming "What youthful vigor in an old man! What devotion of soul!"[25]

Chrysostom depicted Abraham as the consummate "philosopher" who had obtained mastery of his body and soul. Indeed, Chrysostom described Abraham as a greater philosopher than the secular men of his day, asking his flock, "For what, tell me, is the duty of a philosopher? Is it not to despise both riches and glory? Is it not to be above both envy and every other passion? Come now then, let us bring him forward and strip him, and show you what a philosopher he was."[26] As Packard has demonstrated, Chrysostom's frequent mention of

21. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.431.

22. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 17, *PG* 60.566.

23. *De Incomprehensibili dei Natura* 2, *PG* 48.715. John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, trans. Paul W. Harkins, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 84. Here Chrysostom is echoing Paul in Rom. 9:20.

24. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 1, *PG* 61.389 (*NPNF1* 12.276). See also *In epistulam ad Romanos* 17, *PG* 60.566.

25. *In Genesim* 42, *PG* 54.382. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 3 vols., Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 2:412.

26. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 21, *PG* 62.153 (*NPNF1* 13.156).

Abraham's "philosophy" is a reference to the patriarch's virtue in controlling the appetites of the flesh along with such spiritual attributes as humility, a disdain for wealth, endurance, and an embrace of the ascetic life.[27]

Abraham's ability to overcome the limits of his physical body, however, signified his true strength. Chrysostom even imbued Abraham's spiritual struggle with a great degree of physicality. In one of his catechetical homilies Chrysostom explains to the initiates that Abraham "outran the weakness of his human nature and strained with his whole mind toward the power of Him who had made the promise."[28] Chrysostom cautioned his flock not to consider the body to be an impediment to virtue, for the saints have shown that even though they "wore the flesh" they could indeed live a life of virtue, as "Abraham also with Isaac and his grandson shone brightly, having the flesh."[29] Through bodily strength and the rigors of "self-denial," Abraham was a man "delivered from the body and in the flesh disregarding flesh" [καὶ ἄνθρωπον σώματος ἀπαλλαγέντα, καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ σαρκὸς ὑπερορῶντα].[30] Chrysostom ultimately presents an ascetic picture of Abraham as one engaged in a physical struggle and one who, in the monastic ideal, overcame the body and is therefore something akin to an angel. Put another way, the ἄνθρωπον σώματος ἀπαλλαγέντα becomes ἀσώματος, and for this reason the angelic visitors chose to come into his tent and sit at his table. There was, of course, a natural connection between monasticism and living the angelic life on earth of which Chrysostom was certainly aware and sought to convey to his congregation.

Abraham's virtue thus had a transformative effect on his body, which allowed the "just old man" to procreate even though he "had long since exceeded the limits beyond which nature permits one to procreate"[31] and to see as one who "sees with spiritual eyes" [βλέπουσιν οἱ τῆς πίστεως ὀφθαλμοὶ].[32] Though well past his prime, Abraham had become as a ripe fruit [καρποὺς ὡρίμους δεξάμενον].[33] In spite of Abraham's advanced age, Chrysostom presented the gray-headed [πολιός] patriarch firmly within the epideictic

27. For an extended discussion on Chrysostom's use of the term "philosophy," see A. Appleton Packard, "Chrysostom's True Christian Philosophy," *Anglican Theological Review* 45, no. 4 (1963).

28. *Catecheses ad illuminandos* 8, *SC* 50.8. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Walter Burghardt, trans. Paul W. Harkins, vol. 31, Ancient Christian Writers (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1963), 122.

29. *In Joannem* 75, *PG* 59.410.

30. *In Matthaeum* 69, *PG* 58.653 (*NPNF1* 10.406).

31. *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt*, *SC* 79.10.

32. *In illud: Hoc scitote quod in novissimis diebus*, *PG* 56.272.

33. *Sermo cum iret in exsilium*, *PG* 52.436.

category of bodily virtue as a model of vigor, strength, and health, using the encomiastic device of amplification [αὔξησις]. Amplification was a common feature of epideictic oratory, which took aspects of an exemplar's life—large or small, important or unimportant—and exaggerated them. Amplification was a useful tool in praising an individual who overcame difficult circumstances, the effects of age (either when very young or very old), or simply because they were the first to succeed in some task. Naturally, Abraham provided Chrysostom with an excellent subject to which he could apply such methods.

B. Virtues of the Soul

The virtuous soul was marked by the great philosophical categories of prudence [σωφροσύνη], wisdom [σοφία], courage [ἀνδρεία], and justice [δικαιοσύνη]. The sophists augmented the classical cardinal virtues with additional categories of praiseworthy characteristics such as philanthropy, obedience, and self-sacrifice. These virtues of the soul prompted the exemplar to engage in virtuous activities, not for personal gain but on behalf of others.[34] Chrysostom is most explicit in associating the virtues of the soul with Abraham, even referring to the patriarch as Μεγαλόψυχος.[35] It was the "virtue of the soul" above all else that made Abraham "illustrious" [ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν πατριάρχην ἡ λοιπὴ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρετὴ λαμπρὸν ἀπέδειξε].[36] Chrysostom was effusive in the praise of the "boundless greatness of [Abraham's] soul"[37] and employed the philosophical and sophistic categories he learned from Libanius to describe it. Abraham's soul was, for Chrysostom, the throne upon which his faith, justice, and obedience were seated.

Of the four cardinal virtues, Chrysostom more directly associated courage and justice with Abraham than he did prudence and wisdom. For Chrysostom, wisdom was an attribute he associated mostly (although not exclusively) with God. Abraham's greatness lay not in his possession of wisdom but rather in his lack thereof. A significant component of John Chrysostom's exegetical view of Abraham involved the humble upbringing of the patriarch and his ability to make godly choices *without* the benefit of education or religion. Whereas Philo presented Abraham as a wise sage who had mastered Chaldean wisdom,[38]

34. Hubbell, "Chrysostom and Rhetoric," 264.

35. *In Acta apostolorum* 48, *PG* 60.337.

36. *De virginitate*, *SC* 125.82.

37. *Catecheses ad illuminandos* 8, *SC* 50.8. Harkins, Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, 31, 123.

38. Philo begins his biography of Abraham's life by noting the patriarch "for a long time had studied the philosophy of the Chaldaeans." Philo, *De Abrahamo* 70. Philo, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. Charles Duke Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 417.

Chrysostom described Abraham as an uneducated man who came from a "simple and rude" world in which "there was no law to instruct, nor prophets, nor miracles, nor doctrine, nor multitude of men acquainted with it, nor aught else of the kind, but all things then lay as it were in a deep darkness, and a night moonless and stormy."[39] Despite this disadvantage, Chrysostom declared that Abraham was a "wondrous and noble man" who overcame these obstacles and "practiced virtue" in spite of lacking earthly wisdom.[40] In the classical context, wisdom implied some form of formal education, which Abraham did not possess. The rules of the encomium, however, demanded that Chrysostom overlook any flaws of Abraham so that the praise of the patriarch would not turn into an apology.

In response to this convention Chrysostom takes Abraham's lack of education and makes it a virtue. The virtue lies not only in the successful outcome but in the struggle itself, for it is in the struggle that Abraham is able to demonstrate the virtue of a courageous soul. While John describes Abraham striving to find God in a world of ignorance and darkness, the more central struggle that defines the patriarch was his undertaking the *akedah*. Chrysostom portrays Abraham as one who "exhibited great courage" [πλείονα ἀνδρείαν ἐπιδειξάμενον][41] in offering his beloved son as a sacrifice to God. Chrysostom, in a most dramatic way, extolled courage by name as the virtue of Abraham's soul. "What a courageous soul!" [Ὦ ψυχῆς ἀνδρεία!] he exclaimed. "What a courageous attitude!" [Ὦ γνώμης ἀνδρείας!].[42]

There exists, for Chrysostom, a reciprocal relationship between the struggle of the body and the struggle of the soul and a corresponding equivalence in the associated virtues. Indeed, Chrysostom wonders aloud to his congregation how Abraham's soul did not separate from his body when he built the fire of the sacrifice with his own hands.[43] The sacrifice of Abraham, however, was not of the sheep or even his son but of his own will [γνώμην]. Thus, Chrysostom explains, it was not simply Abraham's right hand that was consecrated by the blood of the sheep but also his soul.[44]

39. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 26, *PG* 60.641 (*NPNF1* 11.532).

40. Ibid.

41. *De Lazaro* 5, *PG* 48.1024.

42. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.430–31. In the same passage, Chrysostom himself acknowledges his frequent use of such exclamatory (and virtue laden) language, noting at one point that "[o]nce again, I am amazed at the righteous man's courage: how he was able to build the sacrificial altar, how he had such strength, how he did not collapse in agony" [Πάλιν ἐκπλήττομαι τοῦ δικαίου τὴν ἀνδρείαν, πῶς ἠδυνήθη τὸ θυσιαστήριον οἰκοδομῆσαι, πῶς ἴσχυσε, πῶς οὐ διελύθη ὑπὸ τῆς ἀγωνίας].

43. ". . . ἀλλ' ἐννοήσωμεν πῶς οὐκ ἀπέπτη τοῦ σώματος ἡ ψυχὴ." Ibid.

Chrysostom, like other contemporaneous church fathers, while extolling the virtues of both body and soul, showed a Platonic-like preference for the latter. Indeed, Chrysostom even borrowed Platonic language, using the popular image of the soul's wings from Plato's *Phaedros* to describe the patriarch's virtuous soul. The wings of the soul, in the Platonic sense, transported the exemplar from the sensible world to the supra-sensible world.[45] Chrysostom extols Abraham's virtuous soul, saying that the patriarch's "yearning for God gave him wings, and he did not stop his flight with visible things, nor did he devote himself only to the seed which was promised to him, but fixed his thoughts on what was to come."[46]

Chrysostom called his congregation to emulate Abraham's virtuous soul, not his body. Chrysostom's homilies portray the virtuous soul of an Abraham or a Paul as attractive not only to Christians but also to God. The angelic visitors, therefore, were not drawn to the magnificence of Abraham's tent but rather to the virtue of his soul [ψυχῆς ἀρετήν].[47] When these angels entered his tent, what they found was "a man delivered from the body, and in the flesh disregarding the flesh."[48]

The lesson Chrysostom wished to impart on his listeners was rooted in the simplicity of Abraham, whom he presented as a man of great wealth who wished to live humbly—a trait he wished his flock was keener to emulate. The contextual lesson was that, while Rome was great, so was Sodom, and the angels much preferred the simple hut of Abraham to the splendor (and decadence) of Sodom. For, once again, the angels were "not interested in grandeur of houses but they went about in search of the virtue of the soul" [ἀλλὰ ψυχῆς ἀρετὴν περιῄεσαν].[49]

No doubt, in Chrysostom's rhetorical icon of Abraham there was no small measure of self-portraiture involved. Chrysostom himself lived the simple

44. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 3, *PG* 61.417. In Lev. 8:23 Moses places blood on his right hand. Note that here Chrysostom uses πρόβατον and ἀμνός rather than the scriptural κριὸς, no doubt to heighten the associations of Isaac with Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

45. Constantine Bosinis, "Two Platonic Images in the Rhetoric of John Chrysostom: 'The Wings of Love' and 'The Charioteer of the Soul'," *Studia Patristica* 41 (2006): 433.

46. *Catecheses ad illuminandos* 8, *SC* 50.8. Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, 31, 123. Gregory of Nyssa makes a similar observation, albeit using much more explicit philosophical language. Gregory describes Abraham's departure from Ur as a departure from "his earthly and carnal mind" and in which he raised "his thoughts as far as possible above the common boundaries of nature . . . forsaking the soul's kinship with the senses." Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 2, *PG* 45.940 (*NPNF1* 5.259).

47. *Ad populum Antiochenum*, *PG* 49.40.

48. *In Matthaeum* 69, *PG* 58.653 (*NPNF1* 10.406).

49. *In illud: Vidi dominum* 4, *SC* 277.4.1.

life he associated with Abraham, even when bishop of the capital city of Constantinople. When still a new bishop of the city, Chrysostom famously sold appointments from the episcopal residence, which he deemed to be too extravagant, donated the money to the poor, and eschewed the imperial banquet halls in favor of the simple, bare room in which he lived.[50] Abraham, in this way, becomes a proto-Christian monastic even though he was married and lived centuries before Christ.[51] The paraphrasing of the scriptural text by Chrysostom often reveals such associations, as when he uses "hut" [καλύβη] rather than the scriptural "tent" [σκηνή] to describe the dwelling place of Abraham that the angelic visitors found so inviting.

C. Inherited Blessings

The third category of Theon's categories of virtue, that of inherited blessings, refers to the background and upbringing of the exemplar and provides the framework within which virtue takes place.[52] Menander of Laodicea, writing in the third century CE and building on Theon's model, developed guidelines for epideictic praise. In Menander's framework of encomium he offered an outline of praise of a ruler [βασιλικὸς λόγος] that was popular among writers of the Second Sophistic period. In this outline he stresses the importance of describing the background of a subject, categorized under the headings of ancestry [γένος] and the circumstances of youth [ἀνατροφή]. Ancestry refers to the country [πατρίς], city [πόλις], or nation [ἔθνος] of the exemplar being praised, the circumstances of his youth, and special events in the early years of his life.[53]

Earlier, I noted that Chrysostom regarded Abraham's upbringing as a challenge that he needed to overcome. His father was an idolater [εἰδωλολάτρης][54] and he lacked education or the benefits of religion. Indeed, Chrysostom uses the most explicit language to describe Abraham's parentage in

50. For a description of Chrysostom's arrival to the episcopal See in Constantinople, see John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom, Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 118ff.

51. Chrysostom could only conceive of Abraham as a proto-Christian based on his understanding that true virtue was an exclusively Christian category. As Margaret Schatkin observes, in Chrysostom's works he presents the view "that the Hellenic ideal of virtue is realized only among the Christians." John Chrysostom, *Apologist*, trans. Margaret A. Schatkin and Paul W. Harkins, vol. 73, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 42.

52. The basic encomiastic *topoi* that described such inherited blessings included typical starting points for a speech, like birth, education, and achievement. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*, 135ff.

53. See Theodore Burgess's classic treatment of the subject. Theodore Chalon Burgess, *Epideictic literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902), 122ff.

Chaldea, describing his ancestors as impious individuals and idolaters [ἀσεβεῖς ἦσαν καὶ εἰδωλολάτραι] and barbaric barbarians [βαρβάρων βαρβαρικώτατοι].[55] Nevertheless, Chrysostom declared that Abraham did not follow in his father's idolatrous footsteps but even as a young child [κατὰ τὴν πρώτην ἡλικίαν] was nurtured by God and turned his attention to the divine.[56] While John presented Abraham as virtuous by gaining what he did not have, he was equally virtuous for abandoning what he possessed.

Daniélou comments that, especially in the Christian East, Abraham often appeared as part of a leitmotif of monastic asceticism.[57] The departure of Abraham from Chaldea was an experience that tied neatly into Chrysostom's view of Abraham as a proto-monastic. In leaving his father's land he showed contempt for material possessions, for "he was not bound to his house, (or surely he would never have gone forth) nor to his love of familiar friends, nor to anything else whatever. But what? Glory and money he despised above all others."[58] For Chrysostom, possessions were antithetical to the virtuous life. "Great the tyranny of possessions," he declares, "great the dearth of virtues."[59]

While Chrysostom is emphatic about Abraham's disdain for wealth, he nevertheless presents the patriarch as coming from noble and wealthy stock—a requisite of the sophistic model he applies to the Old Testament sage. "So what of Abraham? He was rich; surely I do not have to convince you of this? Was Abraham rich? Yes, he was rich. Did you take note of his wealth? Have an eye also for his lifestyle."[60] Abraham's rejection of wealth is even more powerful because he came from means. Even though Abraham possessed great wealth, "He built no splendid houses, he enjoyed no luxuries, he had no care about dress, which all are things of this world; but lived in all respects as belonging to the City yonder; he showed hospitality, brotherly love, mercifulness, forbearance, contempt for wealth and for present glory, and for all else."[61]

54. It is interesting to note that Chrysostom is explicit in noting that Abraham's parents worshiped idols.

55. *In Genesim (sermone 9)*, *PG* 54.627.

56. *In Genesim* 36, *PG* 53.333.

57. "Abraham est présenté comme le modèle du triomphe de *l'amor spiritualis* sur *l'amor carnalis*, qui, d'Origène à Saint Bernard, est le leit-motif de l'ascèse monastique." Daniélou, "Abraham dans la tradition chrétienne," 165.

58. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 21, *PG* 62.153.

59. *In Genesim*, *PG* 53.331. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:322.

60. *In illud: Ne timueritis cum dives factus fuerit homo* 1, *PG* 55.505. John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 3 vols. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2003), 3:95.

61. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 24, *PG* 63.168 (*NPNF1* 14.474).

In making Abraham both wealthy and rejecting wealth, Chrysostom fulfilled both Sophistic and Stoic categories. His ability to sacrifice wealth was but an indication that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his "child, his only one, brought up in affluence, in the dawn."[62]

In Chrysostom's rhetorical presentation, Abraham's rejection of wealth is the key to his altruism. In his rejection of wealth, Abraham becomes for Chrysostom what Anthony was for Athanasius—an uneducated man who rejected his home, gave his money to the poor, and retreated from the world in order to follow the call of God. Such obedience caused him to suffer innumerable troubles, but in the end this only serves to enhance Abraham's nobility. Abraham, in John's portrait, used his wealth toward philanthropic ends in order to help alleviate "the pangs of the needy and opening [his] house to every stranger."[63] Chrysostom felt free to amplify and expand on the scriptural text, interpolating logical conclusions about Abraham's behavior where he did not possess specific scriptural witness to support his particular viewpoint, which was in this instance Abraham's great philanthropy.

Chrysostom was a master of adapting rhetorical and philosophical categories to suit his needs. In this representation, Chrysostom instantly transformed Abraham, the austere monk who rejected wealth, into Abraham the wealthy philanthropist. Naturally John qualified what must have seemed to his congregation an inherent contradiction. "Abraham was rich, but he was not covetous; for he turned not his thoughts to the house of this man, nor prayed into the wealth of that man; but going forth he looked around wherever there chanced to be a stranger, or a poor man, in order that he might succor poverty, and hospitably entertain the traveller."[64] Chrysostom presented Abraham as a philanthropic man who possessed "a genuine, warm charity, the contempt of riches, and the father's love for his family."[65] In this way, the patriarch could both care for the poor and be poor. He could thus be an example for the wealthiest congregants in the cathedral or the most indigent.

D. Agonistic Language

The sophistic method makes use of colorful and evocative language. The rhetorical use of metaphors in general and agonistic associations in particular was commonplace and a staple of Chrysostom's homiletical works. Agonistic language, a feature of both the Pauline epistolary corpus and sophistic oratory,

62. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 1, *PG* 61.389 (*NPNF1* 12.276).

63. *In Genesim* 66, *PG* 54.571. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:263.

64. *Ad populum Antiochenum* 2, *PG* 49.47 (*NPNF1* 9.349).

65. *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt*, *SC* 79.13.

which employed athletic and militaristic metaphors, was well suited to John's praise of Abraham. Military terms such as battle [μάχη], war [πόλεμος], and battle line [παράταξις] were common usages for Chrysostom and readily applied to the aging patriarch who battled against human nature and emerged victorious.[66]

The virtue of the body and the soul are actualized in the struggle [ἀγών]. In the struggle, exemplars are able to demonstrate their courage and prudence, and the eventual (and inevitable) victory confirms their virtue. The use of agonistic language to describe virtue has a long history and was articulated by philosophers, orators, and thinkers from Aristotle to Libanius. The former emphasized the practice of virtue as a struggle in a manner similar to that of the Olympic athletes who competed and won because they acted properly in their lives.[67] Athletes and soldiers possessed traits that were similar to those found in exemplars, like Abraham, who struggled to live a virtuous life. Orators projected these traits onto the virtuous exemplar who was engaged in a struggle of greater importance and value.

For Chrysostom, more often than not, the struggle was a spiritual one in which the soul was triumphant over the passions and in which the spiritual world conquered the material world. In describing the superiority of faith over works, Chrysostom explained that the struggle [τὸν ἀγῶνα] in which Abraham was engaged was a "battle for faith against works" [μάχην τῇ πίστει πρὸς τὰ ἔργα].[68] Sometimes the battles were real, as when Abraham rescued his nephew Lot. The presence of the gray-haired and aging patriarch in a battle where he was victorious provided Chrysostom with an opportunity to extol Abraham's martial qualities without resorting to simile. When the wrath of God, however, eventually came down upon Sodom, John tells us that Abraham turned to prayer, for "it was no longer the time for arms, and battle, and array" [καὶ οὐκέτι ὅπλων ἦν ὁ καιρὸς, οὐδὲ μάχης καὶ παρατάξεως] but rather a time "for supplication."[69] Even in prayer, however, Abraham is depicted by Chrysostom as a soldier who supplicated himself before God "even to the point of perishing."[70]

66. For a discussion on Chrysostom's use of military metaphors, see Thomas Edward Ameringer, *The Stylistic Influence of the Second Sophistic on the Panegyrical Sermons of St. John Chrysostom: A Study in Greek Rhetoric* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1921), 59–61.

67. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* 1.8.9. "ὥσπερ δ' Ὀλυμπίασιν οὐχ οἱ κάλλιστοι καὶ ἰσχυρότατοι στεφανοῦνται ἀλλ' οἱ ἀγωνιζόμενοι (τούτων γάρ τινες νικῶσιν), οὕτω καὶ τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ καλῶν κἀγαθῶν οἱ πράττοντες ὀρθῶς ἐπήβολοι γίνονται."

68. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 8, *PG* 60.455.

69. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 29, *PG* 60.659 (*NPNF1* 11.546).

Chrysostom used agonistic language to add emphasis to the struggles Abraham endured. There was no aspect of Abraham's life too mundane to take on the features of an agonistic struggle represented in the extreme as armed combat. For example, in order to fulfill his duty, Abraham, along with his wife Sarah, suffered "many miseries and labors and toils."[71] Nevertheless, they were able to overcome the challenges placed before them because their household was organized as "soldiery" [ἐπὶ στρατηγοῦ] that when properly arrayed gave the enemy "no quarter to attack."[72] Such language demonstrates the hyperbole that was so characteristic of epideictic rhetoric and which Chrysostom so readily adopted.

Abraham, like Paul, was an athlete who fought the good fight for many years and emerged victorious [πρὸ τοσούτων ἐτῶν ἀθλήσαντας καὶ νικήσαντας].[73] The trophy for the victorious athlete was the crown[74] and since Abraham had achieved so much, he was rewarded with the crown of victory [αὐτός γε τὸν στέφανον ἀνεδήσατο].[75] Indeed, Chrysostom argues that he received a "myriad of laudatory crowns"[76] as a fitting trophy for his struggle [τὸν τελευταῖον ἀγῶνα].[77] Chrysostom told his flock that they too could be sharers in the patriarch's crown if they but only admire the great athlete[78] who had endured so much in pursuit of virtue. Here, John paints a picture of his congregation, standing in applause for the great athlete Abraham and sharing in the joy of the patriarch's victory.

Chrysostom, as with other contemporaneous ecclesiastical figures, was fond of sailing metaphors and nautical imagery to describe the exploits of his exemplars. Ameringer notes that it is difficult to ascertain the exact origin of such metaphors.[79] There is, however, precedence for their use in Greek philosophical discourse. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates offers an extended discourse in which the state is likened to a ship.[80] In Basil's treatise on the education of the youth, the Bishop of Caesarea used a sailing metaphor to describe the

70. Ibid.

71. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 26, *PG* 61.221 (*NPNF1* 12.155).

72. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 20, *PG* 62.143 (*NPNF1* 13.148).

73. *In illud: Habentes eundem spiritum*, *PG* 51.298.

74. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 128, *PG* 55.368.

75. *In Genesim* 49, *PG* 54.444.

76. *In illud: Habentes eundem spiritum*, *PG* 51.276.

77. *In Genesim* 48, *PG* 55.434.

78. *De Davide et Saule* 1, *PG* 54.687.

79. Ameringer, *The Stylistic Influence of the Second Sophistic on the Panegyrical Sermons of St. John Chrysostom: A Study in Greek Rhetoric*, 62.

80. Plato, *Republic* 4, 487e–489c.

perilous journey young men undertake in order to receive a proper education.[81] Among the Latin fathers, Jerome, in his letter to Innocent, described his difficult situation to be like that of a passenger who finds himself in charge of a ship and laments that Innocent urged him to "hoist the swelling sails, to loosen the sheets, and to take the helm."[82]

Chrysostom followed a similar motif in which he likened Abraham's struggles to that of a sailor, navigating his way through stormy waters. In this setting, the patriarch was like a sailor who "sailed on unfavorable seas" [ἄπλουν ἔπλει θάλατταν][83] and stretched out his affection toward God as a sailor who needs to stretch out the sails of his boat [τείνειν τὰ ἱστία].[84] In this homily, Chrysostom used the sailing metaphor to compare his congregation's struggles to that of Abraham, saying that "we too are sailing over a great and wide sea, full of many monsters, and of many rocks, and bringing forth for us many storms, and from the midst of serene weather raising up a most violent tempest."[85]

The hospitality that Abraham offered the three angelic visitors was also associated with nautical imagery. Abraham was like "a fisherman casting his net into the sea [who] not only draws up fish but often draws up gold and pearls, so this patriarch, angling for men, once caught angels as well."[86] Such was his philanthropy that Abraham was like a harbor to strangers [λιμὴν τῶν ξένων].[87] In *De Lazaro*, Chrysostom took the agonistic metaphor that he applied to Abraham and extended it to his congregation in order to provide a contextual application for his homily—the preeminent goal of an Antiochene exegete. As Abraham was a harbor to strangers, so must his flock be like a harbor that receives all who have found themselves in the shipwreck of poverty.[88]

81. Basil, *De legendis gentilium libris* 1.25. "Τοῦτο μὲν οὖν αὐτὸ καὶ συμβουλεύσων ἥκω, τὸ μὴ δεῖν εἰς ἅπαξ τοῖς ἀνδράσι τούτοις, ὥσπερ πλοίου τὰ πηδάλια τῆς διανοίας ὑμῶν παραδόντας, ᾗπερ ἂν ἄγωσι, ταύτῃ συνέπεσθαι, ἀλλ' ὅσον ἐστὶ χρήσιμον αὐτῶν δεχομένους, εἰδέναι τί χρὴ καὶ παριδεῖν." Basil, *Aux jeunes gens sur la manière de tirer profit des lettres helléniques*, ed. Fernand Boulenger (Paris: Société d'édition "Les Belles lettres," 1935).

82. Jerome, *Epistola I. Ad Innocentium*. *PL*.23.325 (*NPNF2* 6.1). "Hortaris, ut tumida malo vela suspendam, rudentes explicem, clavum regam."

83. *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt*, *SC* 79.13.1.

84. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 34, *PG* 63.236 (*NPNF1* 14.521).

85. Ibid.

86. *De Lazaro* 2, *PG* 48.988. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 51.

87. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 34, *PG* 61.294.

88. *De Lazaro* 2, *PG* 48.989. "Λιμήν ἐστι τῶν ἐν ἀνάγκῃ ὁ ἐλεήμων· ὁ δὲ λιμὴν τοὺς ναυαγίῳ περιπεσόντας ἅπαντας ὑποδέχεται, καὶ λύει τῶν κινδύνων."

Chrysostom's use of agonistic language was no doubt a product both of his sophistic training and love of Paul, the great athlete for Christ.[89] Indeed, as John Poulakos points out, the art of oratory was, in many ways, a form of athletic competition in which the orator "turned rhetoric into a competitive enterprise."[90] Debra Hawhee correctly notes the didactic function of agonistic language when she observes that the root ἀγών is connected to ἄγω which means "to lead," but in the Platonic sense can also mean "to bring up, train, educate."[91] The athletic, military, and nautical images were used as a tool by Chrysostom to draw his congregation into the homily and make them part of Abraham's world. Chrysostom's use of agonistic language, including athletic imagery, as a pedagogical tool must have been especially useful in fourth-century Antioch, a city obsessed with athletic competition.

3. Model of Pauline Virtue

Even though Chrysostom saw Abraham as the embodiment of classical virtue, he never hesitated to associate the great Christian theological (or Pauline) virtues of faith [πίστις], hope [ἐλπίδα], and charity [ἀγάπη] with the aged patriarch.[92] John, like other early Christian exegetes, viewed Abraham (as he did other figures of the Old Testament) as a proto-Christian who behaved in a particularly Christian fashion. Such an extrapolation seemed self-evident in his world. This view of Abraham as a proto-Christian was grounded in various fundamental preconceptions of the Old Testament narratives. First, for Chrysostom, Abraham was not a *pre*-Christian figure but rather a key figure in the Christian narrative to whom God "preached the Gospel beforehand" [ὁ Θεὸς προευηγγελίσατο τῷ Ἀβραὰμ].[93] Second, Chrysostom would have never considered Abraham's embodiment of the Pauline virtues to be some type of extrapolation from Judaism but was rather something wholly and uniquely Christian. Indeed, Chrysostom goes to great lengths to describe how Abraham's virtue was both inconsistent with the behavior at the time the patriarch lived and with Judaism. The association of the Christian theological virtues with Abraham, therefore, helped Chrysostom distance the patriarch

89. 2 Tim. 4:7.

90. John Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 35.

91. Debra Hawhee, *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 16.

92. 1 Cor. 13:13.

93. Gal. 3:8. *In epistulam ad Galatas commentaries* 3, *PG* 61.651.

from any potential suggestion that Abraham was somehow connected to Jewish norms.

For Chrysostom to associate Abraham with the theological virtues of Paul was not an altogether surprising move since the Genesis account of the great patriarch provides so much material that relates to the qualities of faith, hope, and charity—particularly in regard to the *akedah*. Indeed, John fully appropriates Paul's understanding that the theological virtues were intrinsic to Abraham's character.[94] This association of Abraham's actions in the Genesis narrative with Pauline virtue was so profound for Chrysostom that he claimed the patriarch's virtue was even greater than that of the Christians in Antioch.[95]

In John Chrysostom's exegetical view of Abraham, the theological virtues gave Abraham a profoundly Christian character. In explicitly associating Abraham with these virtues (as his hero Paul had done), John firmly grounded the patriarch's classical virtue in fourth-century Christian soil. This allowed him to use Greek philosophical models and sophistic rhetoric without compelling his exemplar to develop into a full-fledged Stoic sage. Put another way, the Pauline virtues were the Christian flesh put on the bones of the classical virtues.

A. Faith

Chrysostom's extolling of Abraham's faith is primarily an outgrowth of the influence of Paul on his exegetical outlook in general and his commentary on the Pauline corpus in particular. Indeed, Chrysostom often instructed his congregation to "listen to the blessed Paul's preaching on Abraham's faith"[96] and to "listen to what Paul says about Abraham, his obedience, and the faith he showed in everything God said."[97] Paul's use of Abraham as a means of describing the superiority of faith over works and the Law was central to Chrysostom's understanding of the virtue of the patriarch. Such a distinction not only enhanced Abraham's Christian credentials but also distanced him from his Jewish origins and association. The faith of Abraham is, for Chrysostom, the

94. Chrysostom recognized that Paul himself used Abraham as a tool to communicate his theological virtues. "Therefore," he wrote, "Paul was amazed at his faith and thus said, 'By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son'" (Heb. 11:17). *Ad Stagirium a daemone vexatum*, *PG* 47.438.

95. *De virginitate*, *SC* 125.82. When contrasting the virtue of Abraham to that of the Christian populace of Antioch, Chrysostom remarked that "it is not easy to find such behavior today."

96. "Ἄκουε γὰρ τοῦ μακαρίου Παύλου ἀνακηρύττοντος αὐτοῦ τὴν πίστιν." *In Genesim* 37, *PG* 53.347.

97. "ἄκουσον τοῦ Παύλου λέγοντος περὶ τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τῆς ἐκείνου καὶ τῆς ἐν ἅπασι πίστεως." *De Incomprehensibili Dei Natura* 2, *SC* 2.314.

conduit that connects Christians to the Old Testament saints, and it is "in faith they soon became related to the Saints."[98]

The same sophistic techniques that were used to associate the classical virtues with the person of Abraham were adapted to the Pauline virtues, which simply served to supplement and expand the philosophical categories of virtue discussed above. If Abraham was the preeminent model of bodily and spiritual virtue, he was to a greater degree the preeminent model of faith. Thus John declares that "great indeed was the faith of Abraham" [Μεγάλη ὄντως ἡ πίστις τοῦ Ἀβραάμ][99] and, when commenting about his faith, he speaks of the "great virtue" [τὴν πολλὴν ἀρετὴν][100] of "this just man" [τοῦ δικαίου τούτου τὴν ἀρετὴν].[101] This integration of Pauline virtues with classical virtues was not unique to Chrysostom. For example, Gregory of Nyssa, in his treatment of the life of Moses, also augmented and expanded the categories of classical virtue to include the Pauline virtues when describing Moses' ascent into the cloud on Mount Sinai. Jean Daniélou notes that separating classical from Christian virtue into such discrete categories would have been incomprehensible to early church fathers such as Gregory and John, since *all* virtues were applicable in describing the imitation of the divine.[102]

Chrysostom, interpreting Paul, described Abraham's faith, and its emulation by Christians, as the marker of the Abrahamic covenant—not circumcision. Paul, he says, viewed circumcision as only a sign and comments that Abraham had reached "such a height of virtue" long before he was circumcised. Thus Abraham was, for Chrysostom, the living embodiment of Pauline faith, since "[t]he patriarch Abraham himself before receiving circumcision had been declared righteous on the score of faith alone."[103] The natural corollary was that Christians who embodied the type of faith of which Paul spoke were the inheritors of Abraham's covenant with God, not those who had received circumcision. Chrysostom bolstered his assertion by touting Paul's credentials as a Jew and noting that the Apostle was "schooled at the feet of Gamaliel" and was a "precise student of the Law" [ἀκρίβειαν τὸν νόμον

98. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 19, *PG* 60.593 (*NPNF1* 11.494).

99. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 25, *PG* 63.171 (*NPNF1* 14.477).

100. *In Genesim* 39, *PG* 53.368.

101. *In Genesim* 54, *PG* 54.435.

102. Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse*, Coll. Théologie. Études pub. sous la direction de la Faculté de Théologie S.J. de Lyon-Fourvière (Paris: Aubier [Éditions Montaigne]), 1944), 101–2.

103. *In Genesim* 27, *PG* 53.243.

παιδευθείς].[104] Indeed, Chrysostom often referred to Paul with the epithet νομομαθής.[105]

Chrysostom devotes a considerable amount of his exegesis to the relationship between Abraham's faith and circumcision in order to address what he viewed as the "proud speech of the Jews" ['Ιουδαίων μεγαληγορίαν][106] and their claims that circumcision made one an inheritor of the promise to Abraham. It is not at all unusual that Chrysostom chose to focus so much of his discussion regarding Abraham's faith with circumcision. As Daniel Harrington and James Keenan observe, "The concept of covenant with its notion of God's fidelity to Israel and what was expected of Israel by way of response is fundamental for understanding the New Testament idea of faith."[107] Chrysostom, in articulating this "New Testament idea of faith," also found an opportunity to differentiate his Christian community and their claims to the Abrahamic relationship through faith with that of the Jewish community in Antioch and their claims to relationship through circumcision.[108] Robert Hill notes that "the length and intensity of this tirade against circumcision illustrate Chrysostom's feelings about the Judaism of his time."[109] The theological thread for this feeling is the Pauline interpretation of Hagar representing Israel according to the flesh and Sarah representing Israel according to grace. Thus Chrysostom sees Christ's proclamation that "God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones"[110] within the context of Pauline virtue when he asks his congregation, "Do you see how by casting out their carnal relationship, he is bringing in that which is of faith?"[111]

Notwithstanding inherent Christian bias, circumcision simply did not fit into any of the categories of virtue with which Chrysostom was familiar. It is fair, therefore, to take John at his word when he expresses his confusion and asks, "What is circumcision? For is it any good deed on his part that hath it? Is it any manifestation of a right choice?"[112] When speaking about

104. *In Genesim* 39, *PG* 53.368. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:386.

105. See, for example, *In Acta apostolorum* 20, *PG* 60.236 and *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 6, *PG* 62.45.

106. *In Matthaeum* 52, *PG* 58.521.

107. Daniel J. Harrington and James F. Keenan, *Paul and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 78.

108. The Jewish understanding of circumcision and its relationship to the Abrahamic covenant is indeed a complex one that is further complicated by how Jews viewed the incorporation of non-Jews into that covenant. For more on this subject, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

109. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*.

110. Matt. 3:9.

111. *In Matthaeum*, *PG* 57.194 (*NPNF1* 10.66).

Abraham's faith, Chrysostom devotes so much exegetical space to the issue of circumcision because, in the patriarch's exemplary faith, he sees the refutation of the Jewish position regarding circumcision and the preeminence of Christian virtue. According to John's logic, Abraham was first the father of the uncircumcised Christians and only secondly the father of Jews because he was faithful before he was circumcised. Thus he states, "For if he was justified and crowned while in uncircumcision, the Jews came in afterwards, Abraham is then the father first of the uncircumcised, which through faith appertain to him, and then of those in the circumcision."[113] Christianity, for John, was anterior to Judaism, not the other way around.

The sheer number of references to faith and circumcision by Chrysostom demonstrates the place of primacy he afforded the former over the latter. These references were both a polemical and theological tool and the emphasis is, at times, quite extreme. Such is the case when he states after a long harangue on "the lofty spirit of the Jews" that "if you follow not in the steps of his faith, though you were ten thousand times in a state of circumcision [μυριάκις ᾖς ἐμπερίτομος], you will not be Abraham's offspring."[114]

At stake in this polemical discussion was "the promise of the inheritance" [ἡ ἐπαγγελία τῆς κληρονομίας], which is the central focus of Chrysostom's theological interpretation of Abraham and the end result of the patriarch's faith. Ever the Antiochene, Chrysostom was eminently concerned that his flock felt "confidence in the virtues of our ancestry" and urged them repeatedly to imitate Abraham's faith.[115] If the Scythian emulated Abraham's faith then he became "Abraham's son," and if his son did not emulate Abraham's faith he is "more of an alien to him than the Scythian."[116] Chrysostom could not be more explicit as to where he saw Jews and Christians in terms of the promise of the inheritance: the inheritors were not his blood relatives [οἱ τὴν φυσικὴν ἔχοντες πρὸς αὐτὸν συγγένειαν] but those who imitated his faith [οἱ τὴν πίστιν ἐκείνου μιμησάμενοι].[117]

In his commentary on Galatians, Chrysostom buttresses his argument that faith preceded circumcision by arguing that faith also preceded the Law [τοῦ νόμου πρεσβυτέρα ἡ πίστις].[118] There is no ambiguity in Chrysostom's

112. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 6, *PG* 60.434 (*NPNF1* 11.370).

113. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 8, *PG* 60.457.

114. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 8, *PG* 60.458.

115. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 19, *PG* 60.593.

116. Ibid.

117. *In epistulam ad Galatas commentaries* 3, *PG* 61.651.

118. Ibid.

interpretation of Paul in general and his epistle to the Galatians in particular. Where Paul declares that Christians are "sons of God through faith" Chrysostom tacks on a rejoinder: "By faith, not by the Law" [Διὰ τῆς πίστεως, οὐ διὰ τοῦ νόμου].[119] Thus by deemphasizing, at a minimum, and negating, at a maximum, the significance of circumcision as a sign of divine favor and of covenant with God, when compared to the requisite faith that leads to both, Chrysostom has laid the foundation for a proof that his congregation, and all Christians, number among the Abrahamic hosts. By so doing, he aims to undercut Jewish claims to Abrahamic heritage.

Chrysostom justified spiritual inheritance by ascribing an almost Christ-like birth to Isaac. Echoing Galatians 4, Chrysostom notes that the offspring of Hagar represented the carnal Law since he was born according to the order of nature. In describing the birth of Isaac, however, John is much more explicit—not content to simply mention that he was "born according to the Spirit."[120] The offspring of Sarah represented spiritual Christianity, since "he was the issue of bodies that were dead, and of a womb that was dead; his conception was not by the flesh, nor his birth by the seed, for the womb was dead both through age and barrenness, but the Word of God fashioned Him."[121] John ties this logic together by asserting that, while Christians maintained a spiritual bloodline to Abraham through Isaac and his miraculous birth, Jews were like Ishmael who was born according to the flesh and cast out of his father's house.

Notwithstanding embellishments on the Pauline text, Chrysostom couches his description of the faith of Abraham (and Christian emulation of that faith) within the language of virtue. The offspring of Abraham are "virtuous people," for "one clad in virtue is mightier than all." If Jews are not the children of Abraham, then the logical conclusion is that they lack virtue and this is exactly the point Chrysostom makes. How can Jews be a blessing to the nations if they are "overwhelmed with curses"?[122]

119. *In epistulam ad Galatas commentaries* 3, *PG* 61.656.

120. Gal. 4:29.

121. "Οὐ γὰρ ἡ σὰρξ τὴν κύησιν, οὐδὲ τὸ σπέρμα τὸν τόκον εἰργάσαντο· νεκρὰ γὰρ ἡ μήτρα, καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν καὶ διὰ τὴν πήρωσιν, ἀλλ' ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ λόγος αὐτὸν ἔπλασεν." *In epistulam ad Galatas commentaries* 4, *PG* 61.661 (*NPNF1* 13.33).

122. "Ὅτι γὰρ οὐ περὶ Ἰουδαίων εἴρηται, τὰ πράγματα δηλοῖ· οἱ γὰρ αὐτοὶ κατάρας γέμοντες, πῶς ἂν ἄλλοις εὐλογίας γένοιντο αἴτιοι;" *Expositiones in Psalmos* 112, *PG* 55.292. John goes on to say that "[n]othing is mightier than virtue, after all: it is harder than rock and tougher than steel, just as consequently nothing is lower than vice, nothing weaker, even if you have considerable outside influence." John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 2 vols. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 2:57.

In Chrysostom's sophistic presentation of the virtuous Abraham, faith was the virtue underlying all the classical virtues. It was by faith that Abraham showed courage even though he was an old man.[123] The virtue of faith helped Abraham overcome his lack of earthly wisdom and become spiritually wise.[124] Unmovable faith gave him prudence and a "steady disposition."[125] Abraham's obedience and faith in God allowed him to dispense justice in his household.[126] For Chrysostom, faith was the chief among the Pauline virtues and, one could argue, the foundation for all of the others.

B. Hope

Abraham certainly had plenty for which to hope. Indeed, the measure of Abraham's faith was so great because God had promised him so much.[127] That the Pauline virtues of faith and hope were inextricably linked was acknowledged by John, who commented that "nature and age were driving Abraham to despair, but faith was holding out to him hope of success" [ἡ δὲ πίστις ἐλπίδας ὑπέτεινε χρηστάς].[128] Whereas faith could be found underlying all of Abraham's virtuous characteristics, the patriarch's hope was conversely supported by all of the other virtues. In order to maintain hope that God would indeed fulfill the promises made to him, he needed a strong mind, body, and soul.[129] Chrysostom's application of the virtue of hope was, in principle, a pastoral tool that he could use pedagogically. The difficulties of Abraham's life and his suffering magnified "the good man's virtue," since "in the hope of things to come [τῇ ἐλπίδι τῶν μελλόντων] . . . he overlooked present realities, and, in the expectation of greater things, he set less store by those of this life—and this before the Law and the age of Grace."[130] Once again, Chrysostom magnified any virtue that Abraham manifested since he considered the task for Christians much easier than Abraham's in light of the gospel. Through

123. *In Genesim* 49, *PG* 54.444.

124. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 116, *PG* 55.321.

125. *In Genesim* 37, *PG* 53.347.

126. *In Genesim* 42, *PG* 54.388.

127. Harrington and Keenan note that "[i]n Greek thought, the object of hope may be (among other things) life after death based on the immortality of the soul (Plato) or happiness in this life (Aristotle). In the Hebrew Scriptures and in early Judaism, hope was based on the promises of God . . ." In this way Chrysostom was more in line with the latter than he was with the former, albeit in a way augmented by the promises of Christ in the New Testament. Harrington and Keenan, *Paul and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology*, 99.

128. *De Incomprehensibili Dei Natura* 2, *SC* 2.314.

129. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 17, *PG* 60.566.

130. *In Genesim* 48, *PG* 54.435. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:26–27.

virtue Abraham "opened himself up to hope" [ἐκεχήνει πρὸς τὰ ἐν ἐλπίσι], abandoning that which he knew, and "stretched forth to the noetic" [πρὸς τὰ νοητὰ ἀνετείνατο].[131]

Chrysostom makes a distinction between the hopefulness of the Christians in contrast to what he sees as the hopelessness of the Jews. For John, the distinction was between the spiritual and the carnal. He argues that the Christian's hope is that of the spirit whereas the Jews have their hope in "vain imagination about things of the body, and from their refuge in their forefathers; in order that they might rest the hope of their salvation in their own repentance and continence." Chrysostom made use of the familiar trope that Jews "rest their hopes of salvation in Abraham" in order to clarify his opinion regarding the relationship of Abraham to Christians and Jews.[132] In Chrysostom's polemic, based in large measure on the New Testament narrative and Pauline corpus, Jews are presented as having placed the hope of their salvation solely on their biological relationship to Abraham. Such polemic served as an object lesson for Chrysostom, as he instructed his flock not to view their own baptism in a similar fashion.

Abraham's achievements were possible, in large measure, because of his hope in God's providence, even in the most extreme circumstances. His son Isaac was produced not only by nature but by the patriarch's "shining hope" [ὑποφαίνοντα ἐλπίδας] that, despite his and his wife's advanced age, God would fulfill the promise that he would be the father of many nations and his seed would be more numerous than the stars of heaven.[133] Abraham's hope shined forth like the rising sun even if such hope was "beyond the limits of nature and human logic."[134] It was this same hope that led Chrysostom to conclude that Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead when he was told to sacrifice his beloved son. In this way, Chrysostom could explain to his congregation how Abraham could have brought himself to sacrifice the very object of his hope. If Abraham's hope of a child could be realized at the age of one hundred, then it was only natural that Abraham could hope "that He would also raise him up after he had been slain in sacrifice."[135] In John's context of Abraham as a proto-Christian, it was only natural to conclude that Abraham

131. *In Genesim (sermone 9)*, *PG* 54.627.

132. *In Joannem* 54, *PG* 59.299.

133. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 1, *PG* 61.389.

134. *In Genesim* 36, *PG* 53.340. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:336.

135. "καὶ νεκρὸν ἐγείρειν, καὶ ὅτι σφαγιασθέντα ἀναστήσει, ἐπέπειστο." *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 25, *PG* 63.172.

would have an immediate expectation of the resurrection of his only-begotten son.

Through examples such as these, Chrysostom communicated to his flock Abraham's steadfast hope in the face of adversity because "the man who believes in God gives glory to him, [but] the man who refuses to believe turns the dishonor done to God onto his own head."[136] Christians, however, should be able to believe much more because they were promised much more.[137] In describing the virtue of Abraham's hope, Chrysostom goes to lengths to describe the "weakness of reason" [τῶν λογισμῶν τὴν ἀσθένειαν].[138] Indeed, Abraham succeeded only because he was able to set aside all human reason [πάντα λογισμὸν ἀνθρώπινον παρωσάμενος] and transcend it [τὰ ὑπερβαίνοντα τὸν ἀνθρώπινον λογισμὸν].[139] Only by going beyond reason could Abraham place his hope in the fulfillment of promises that contradicted the reality that surrounded him.[140]

C. Charity

Abraham was a father figure within both Christian and Jewish consciousness. In recognition of this reality, Chrysostom, as we have seen, went to great lengths to articulate the ways in which Christians were children of Abraham, even if not by blood. The spiritual way in which John viewed Abraham as a father prompted him to offer a nuanced description of fatherhood in which he declared that "begetting alone constitutes not a father; but after begetting, also loving."[141] Love, in the Pauline sense, was a sacrificial act intimately linked to the idea of freedom in which someone becomes the "slave" of another.[142]

In describing Abraham's virtue of love, Chrysostom's description of Abraham's love as a father of his household translated to the patriarch's love as the father of all the nations. Abraham loved Sarah, and she loved him [κἀκεῖνος αὐτὴν οὕτως ἠγάπα].[143] This reciprocal love extended to Isaac and all of the servants of his household. Chrysostom speaks directly about the importance of Abraham's virtuous love, noting that it is a defining characteristic of the saints

136. *De Incomprehensibili Dei Natura* 2, *SC* 2.314.

137. *In Genesim* 36, *PG* 53.340.

138. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 116, *PG* 55.321.

139. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.430.

140. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 25, *PG* 63.171.

141. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 15, *PG* 61.506.

142. Harrington and Keenan, *Paul and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology*, 91.

143. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 20, *PG* 62.143.

and that love was the principal motivation for his coming to the aid of his nephew Lot.[144] Such love was in emulation of the great love God as a father exhibited for his patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob [καὶ τὴν πολλὴν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἀγάπην].[145] Chrysostom describes Abraham as embodying this divine fatherly affection by virtue of the patriarch's "genuine, warm charity" [ἀγάπην γνησίαν καὶ θερμήν] and "fatherly love for his family."[146]

The hospitality of Abraham[147] is the preeminent example of charity in the Genesis narrative and correspondingly in Chrysostom's treatment of the patriarch. A considerable portion of Chrysostom's pastoral preaching concerned philanthropy, and he returned to the example of the "hospitality of Abraham" [ἡ φιλοξενία τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ] as a trope for Christian charity. Chrysostom repeatedly cited Abraham's love of strangers as a virtue that his flock should emulate and he asks his congregation, "Do you see the good man's affection? Did you gain an insight into the great power of those who practice virtue?"[148] It was, after all, Abraham's virtue that brought the angels to his tent in the first place.[149]

Chrysostom preached a series of homilies using the parable of Lazarus and the rich man as a vehicle for his teaching on the subject of philanthropy.[150] In these homilies, Chrysostom noted that Abraham is mentioned in the parable, as opposed to other Old Testament figures such as Noah, Jacob, Lot, or Isaac, since Abraham's hospitality was "a more serious accusation against the rich man's inhumanity."[151] Abraham's hospitality was an opportunity for Chrysostom to firmly extol the patriarch's great virtue in terms of the Pauline attribute of love. Indeed, Chrysostom is most evocative in his description of this particular virtue, stating that his "enthusiasm" [προθυμίαν] for offering his hospitality was "evidence of more ardent love" [ἐπιδείκνυσι τὸν ἔρωτα].[152] Later on in this homily, John presents Abraham's value as a model of Christian love when he asks his flock to consider how Abraham even "taught [Sarah] to imitate

144. *In epistulam i ad Thessalonicenses* 4, *PG* 62.421.

145. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 224, *PG* 55.400.

146. *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt*, *SC* 79.13.

147. Gen. 18:1–8.

148. *In Genesim* 42, *PG* 54.391.

149. *In Genesim* 42, *PG* 54.387.

150. Luke 16:19–31. These homilies were offered during John's time as a priest in Antioch in 388 or 389. *PG* 48.963–1054. For an overview of the homilies see Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, 10–18.

151. *De Lazaro* 6, *PG* 48.1039. Ibid., 117.

152. *In Genesim* 41, *PG* 53.381. In reference to this passage, Hill notes that "[f]or Chrysostom, Abraham, like the other major characters of primeval and patriarchal history, is a moral figure conspicuous for that cardinal virtue, *prothumia*, 'enthusiasm,' as opposed to the capital sin of *rhathumia*, 'indifference.'" Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:411.

his virtue."[153] Chrysostom clearly states his opinion regarding the extent of Abraham's pedagogical value as a model of virtue when he declares that, from the moment the patriarch offered his hospitality at Mamre "he proved an instructor of everyone."[154]

John never hesitated to note the virtue of Abraham's charity. The third theological virtue was a key component in the patriarch's virtuous makeup. At times, he even ran out of words to describe it. Abraham demonstrated "hospitality, brotherly love, mercifulness, and forbearance" [φιλοξενίαν, φιλαδελφίαν, ἐλεημοσύνην, ἀνεξικακίαν].[155] In welcoming others he was an image of "friendliness" [φιλοφροσύνην].[156] Moreover, through his "virtuous actions" God deemed Abraham worthy to be called "a friend of God" [φιλόθεος].[157] The presentation of Abraham in Chrysostom's works was a holistic one in which the virtue of charity played an important role if, for no other reason, to satisfy the preacher's need for homiletical examples of philanthropy. Perhaps there can be no better testimony to this exemplary role of charity than Chrysostom's blunt proclamation that "Abraham was hospitable" [Φιλόξενος ἦν ὁ Ἀβραάμ].[158]

4. Model of Righteousness

When discussing Abraham's virtue, I have elected to treat the category of righteousness [δικαιοσύνην] independently. Although "righteousness" is a distinct cardinal virtue, it has a special character in Christian discourse in general and the Pauline corpus in particular. In John's discussion of the patriarch's righteousness, he sometimes blurred the distinction between philosophical and Christian righteousness. Abraham is the just patriarch who fairly and equitably manages his sons and servants by dispensing righteousness and judgment [ποιεῖν δικαιοσύνην καὶ κρίσιν].[159] Chrysostom referred to Abraham as "the righteous man" [ὁ δίκαιος] from whom his flock needed to learn in order to imitate his virtue.[160] So great was Abraham's virtue that, even the command

153. Ibid.

154. *In Genesim* 42, *PG* 54.387. Ibid., 2:423.

155. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 24, *PG* 63.168.

156. *Ne timueritis cum dives factus fuerit homo*, *PG* 55.505.

157. *Vidi dominum (homiliae 1–6)*, *SC* 277.4.2.

158. *De Lazaro* 2, *PG* 48.988; *De Lazaro* 6, *PG* 48.1039; *Ne timueritis cum dives factus fuerit homo*, *PG* 55.506.

159. *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae*, *PG* 47.355.

160. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 31, *PG* 60.659

to sacrifice his son could not make the righteous man stagger [οὐδὲ οὕτως ἰλιγγίασεν ὁ δίκαιος].[161]

More prominently, however, Chrysostom emphasized that Abraham's righteousness flowed from the fountainhead of his faith. In his homilies and treatises, John repeatedly mentions that Abraham had achieved the summit of virtue long before he had been circumcised. Just as often, such a reference is part of a larger polemic directed against a hypothetical Jewish claim or claimant.[162] Thus "the patriarch Abraham himself before receiving circumcision had been declared righteous on the score of faith alone" [ἀπὸ τῆς πίστεως μόνης ἐδικαιώθη].[163] In a similar fashion, John adopted the Pauline argument that righteousness could not be obtained as a result of mere observance of the Law. As we have seen, Chrysostom repeatedly emphasized that faith was older than the Law [τοῦ νόμου πρεσβυτέρα ἡ πίστις] as demonstrated by the example of Abraham [καὶ τοῦτο δῆλον ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀβραάμ].[164] Therefore, Abraham's righteousness preceded the giving of the Law. For Chrysostom, this was a sign that God had intended all of the nations to be made righteous (justified) by faith [ἐκ πίστεως δικαιωθῆναι τὰ ἔθνη].[165]

Consistent with the athletic imagery in his rhetorical flourishes, John Chrysostom regarded righteousness as a trophy to be won by Abraham. The aged patriarch was involved in a struggle that defied "the limits of nature and human reason" and in which his "faith in God won righteousness for him" [καὶ ἡ πίστις ἡ περὶ αὐτὸν τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτῷ ἐκόμισεν].[166] Pleasure on earth was the domain of evil men. The righteous, however, were meant to struggle on earth *because* they were righteous. "Abraham was a righteous man," says John, "and he enjoyed things here as well, though with affliction and trials."[167] Righteousness, however, did not simply mean to suffer; it also meant

161. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 25, *PG* 63.171.

162. Consider, for example, the following diatribe when Chrysostom speaks elsewhere about faith preceding circumcision: "The ungrateful and unresponsive Jews, however, despite the light of truth, are still seated in darkness and, despite the sun of justice shining and spreading its rays of light in every direction, they are still attached to the light of a lantern and, despite the age for solid food, they are still dependent upon milk, nor can they bring themselves to heed blessed Paul shouting aloud about the patriarch, 'He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith he showed while uncircumcised.'" *In Genesim* 39, *PG* 53.368. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:386.

163. *In Genesim* 27, *PG* 53.243. In this passage, Chrysostom also notes that the same was true for Noah before the flood [καὶ ὁ Νῶε κατὰ τὴν πολλὴν δικαιοσύνην τὸ κλυδώνιον ἐκεῖνο τὸ χαλεπὸν διέφυγε].

164. *In epistulam ad Galatas commentaries* 3, *PG* 61.651.

165. Ibid.

166. *In Genesim* 36, *PG* 53.340.

to succeed. Since Abraham was a "righteous man," he was able to follow God's commands.[168]

Since righteousness proceeded from faith, it was in this sense a virtue born out of virtue. John took Pauline theology and clothed it in his own rhetorical language to convince his flock that the blessings of Abraham belonged to them, not to the Jews. No doubt, John saw Paul as a kindred spirit who also battled Judaizers in an effort to convince his first-century flock that Abraham was the father of Christians, not the father of the Jews. In this regard, Chrysostom, like Paul, vigorously sought to attach both righteousness and the faith from which it flowed to Abraham as a way to diminish the Jewish practice of circumcision and observance of the Law. This is a theme common in the early church. Justin Martyr, for example, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, makes a similar claim: "For when Abraham himself was in uncircumcision, he was justified and blessed by reason of the faith which he reposed in God, as the scripture tells. Moreover, the Scriptures and the facts themselves compel us to admit that he received circumcision for a sign, and not for righteousness."[169]

John, while making repeated reference to the Pauline language of justification by faith [ἐκ πίστεως δικαιωθῆναι], gives no indication that such justification is *sola fide*. The evidence of this appears in the emphasis Chrysostom places on the activities of Abraham as proof of his righteousness.[170] To be fair, such distinctions can be ambiguous if, for no other reason than that Chrysostom blends characteristics of Greek philosophical righteousness with Pauline righteousness into a composite image of the patriarch. With regard to the former, righteousness is a result of sound judgment, and with regard to the latter, righteousness flows from faith.[171]

5. Man Who Transcends Nature

Faith, for Chrysostom, not only gives birth to righteousness but also transforms the individual. Chrysostom offered up Abraham as a preeminent model of

167. "ὁ Ἀβραὰμ δίκαιος ἦν καὶ ἀπήλαυσε καὶ τῶν ἐνταῦθα, πλὴν μετὰ θλίψεως καὶ πειρασμῶν." *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 26, *PG* 63.178.

168. *In epistulam i ad Timotheum* 14, *PG* 62.578.

169. *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, *PG* 6.528 (*ANF* 1.206).

170. Chrysostom declared that Abraham showed his virtue "by practicing them beforehand in his acts." *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt*, *SC* 79.13.

171. Amirav, in describing Chrysostom's opinion of Noah's righteousness makes a similar observation, stating that "the pillars upon which righteousness rests are not dependent on any external circumstances but on one's own judgment." Hagit Amirav, *Rhetoric and Tradition: John Chrysostom on Noah and the Flood*, Traditio Exegetica Graeca (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 205–6.

faith and righteousness and presented him as a man able to transcend nature and accomplish tasks that otherwise would have been impossible. In faith, Abraham "was able to do what was contrary to nature" [παρὰ φύσιν][172] and was able to conquer fear like the greatest Stoic sage. Abraham, the model of bodily and spiritual virtue, is in Chrysostom's homilies a type of superman who "divested himself of nature . . . threw himself into danger [and] suffered troubles innumerable."[173] Once the athletic battle is engaged, Abraham emerges victorious, having "conquered nature" [φύσιν νικωμένην].[174]

Transcending nature, for Chrysostom, had two components. The first was the ability to overcome aspects of physical nature and the limits of humanity in order to receive the benefits of God's promise [ἐπαγγελία]. Abraham's overcoming of both the physical limits of age and sterility was a common reference for Chrysostom. Forbearance in the face of physical adversity heightened Abraham's virtue that much more. The second aspect was Abraham's ability to transcend spiritual limitation in order to serve as a model of virtue. These spiritual limitations were as natural as the frailty of old age, such as the pain of a father asked to sacrifice his beloved son or the belief that one could father an entire nation even in advanced old age.

The magnitude of Abraham's deeds provided Chrysostom with ample material to present the patriarch as an example of how natural limitations could be overcome if one only had faith in God's promises. In obeying God's command to sacrifice his son, the righteous man [ὁ δίκαιος] "set aside every human consideration and had one single concern, to put into effect the command; as though transcending human nature and putting all compassion and fatherly affection second to God's commands."[175] Indeed, in order to undertake the *akedah* Abraham needed to outstep his nature [ἔξω τῆς φύσεως γενόμενος],[176] despite Chrysostom's recognition of the likelihood of Abraham's naturally being "especially . . . deeply stirred with longing."[177]

While Abraham's ability to transcend human nature fulfilled John's rhetorical requirements, it also helped serve Paul's usage that Gentiles were grafted into the olive tree of Israel "contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree."[178] For Chrysostom the person of Abraham stood for the "olive tree of

172. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 19, *PG* 60.591.

173. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 24, *PG* 63.168.

174. *Vidi dominum (homiliae 1–6)*, *SC* 277.4.

175. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.430. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:17.

176. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 5, *PG* 61.432 (*NPNF1* 12:303).

177. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 141, *PG* 55.435.

178. Romans 11:24.

Israel." John states that since Abraham lived a life contrary to nature before circumcision, before the Law, and before the prophets, this demonstrated that Christians can indeed be grafted "into Abraham" [ἐνεκεντρίσθη τῷ Ἀβραάμ] and that they should "not suppose the Jew to have the advantage."[179] The pastoral end was simple enough: if Abraham could transcend his physical and spiritual nature, then so could his spiritual children represented by the Antiochene flock to which John preached.

6. Conclusion

Abraham's personification of the classical and Pauline categories of virtue established his credibility as a pastoral model for Chrysostom's flock. Chrysostom's description of the virtuous qualities of Abraham in accordance with the epideictic oratorical style was not simply a matter of preference but rather a necessity. A precise definition of Abraham's virtue in accordance with the prevailing parameters of the day would have been expected by the more educated members who were in attendance when he praised the virtue of the father of all nations. The need for such a definition was heightened by Abraham's Old Testament pedigree, which required that the preeminent Israelite patriarch be firmly ensconced in the language of classical Greek and contemporaneous Christian discourse in order to be both accepted and understood by Chrysostom's fourth-century listeners.

Chrysostom, through his mastery of the epideictic oratory, not only placed Abraham firmly within the classical context of virtue but used the patriarch's classical virtue to help explain his fulfillment of Pauline virtue and to make what he regarded as a tenable claim upon Abraham's paternity. In many ways, Chrysostom was not simply expanding the categories of virtue but synthesizing them. Thus, Abraham's faith is derived from the virtue of his soul, and his great hope gives him the courage to overcome even the most daunting tasks. Perhaps the most significant aspect of Chrysostom's presentation of Abraham's virtue is that such a complete definition of virtue, encompassing the major classical and theological categories, appeared not in a single treatment but throughout the corpus of his works. Chrysostom's admission that he makes "mention of [Abraham] and on all occasions"[180] is an indication that John may have considered an extended, self-contained encomium to be superfluous. It is also possible that John viewed an extended encomium as insufficient since he believed that the patriarch was "found to possess all [virtue]."[181]

179. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 19, *PG* 60.591.

180. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 35, *PG* 61.302 (*NPNF1* 12.213).

Chrysostom's description of Abraham's virtue exhibits the preacher's typical ekphrastic style, in which he painted a vivid picture of the patriarch's virtuous attributes using the standard conventions of the epideictic method. Such a portrayal was certainly consistent with Chrysostom's preaching, in which the audience is drawn into the drama of the narrative. While the scriptural narrative was inherently dramatic, Chrysostom enhances this inherent drama with agonistic imagery that made his descriptions of dry philosophical and theological virtue take life in the person of the aged patriarch, who struggles against adversity to achieve all virtue and transcend his own human nature.

The ultimate goal of John's detailed and exhaustive presentation of Abraham's virtue was its imitation by the members of his community. As I will present in the next chapter, the imitation of this virtue took place in very specific, pastoral contexts in which Chrysostom applied the more general categories of virtue to particular pastoral situations. In this pastoral presentation, the virtue of Abraham assumed a real-world application, in which Abraham's virtuous qualities were applied to the specific religious and social concerns of his congregation.

181. Ibid.

3

Abraham's Pastoral Significance

1. Introduction

The Antiochene method, as presented above, was eminently concerned with the impact scriptural exegesis had on the day-to-day lives of Christians. The practical nature of their interpretive method necessitated a real-life application for the Christians who read, or more likely, heard these exegetical formulations. Chrysostom's principal role as a preacher in the cathedral of Antioch further enhanced this necessity, as he was tasked with helping to form baptized Christians and to catechize new ones. His homilies were, more often than not, pastoral in nature and addressed a host of practical issues that would not be unfamiliar to any contemporary minister. As Andrew Jacobs so aptly puts it, "For early Christians, the interpretation of Scripture was not a literary exercise carried out in the remote recesses of the mind. Biblical interpretation served to map out the moral and salvific relationship between humans, the world, and divinity."[1] In this setting, the virtue of figures like Abraham was not extolled for the rhetorical sake of praise alone but to show that such virtue was indeed achievable by everyday Christians. The fourth-century preacher thus adapted and extended Abraham's virtue to suit the pastoral needs of his flock, making the biblical patriarch an exemplar for the rich and the poor, the married and the monastic.

Chrysostom repeatedly commanded his flock to imitate Abraham [μίμησαι τὸν Ἀβραάμ].[2] Such imitation of the patriarch's virtue was applicable to every aspect of life—from the raising of children to virginity. He exhorted his congregation with the refrain, "Let us also then imitate him" [τοῦτον δὴ καὶ ἡμεῖς μιμώμεθα] as a way to spur the faithful to put into practice the patriarch's virtue, which he extolled.[3] John observed that Abraham was even a model

1. Andrew S. Jacobs, "'Let Him Guard Pietas': Early Christian Exegesis and the Ascetic Family," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11, no. 3 (2003): 266.

2. *Vidua eligatur*, *PG* 51.329, 334; *Sermo cum iret in exsilium*, *PG* 52.436.

of emulation for his scriptural descendants, such as Job, who imitated the patriarch's generosity.[4] The rhetorical method, prone as it was to hyperbole, spurred John to set the pastoral bar quite high for his flock. Chrysostom challenged his congregation, saying, "Would you like to imitate Abraham? Imitate him, then: far from hindering you, I urge you, though more is required of us than of Abraham: 'If your righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees,' Scripture says, 'you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.'" Chrysostom, however, relaxes the standard for the faithful, allowing that "[f]or the time being, however, [they should] at least reach the standard of Abraham."[5] After all, if Christian saints like Bernice and Prosdoke could imitate Abraham and abandon their country to receive eternal rewards, then surely his flock could also imitate him.[6] Indeed, the goal was not only to imitate him but to become as one of his 318 servants.[7]

The presence of Abraham in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man was also a convenient tool for Chrysostom to use in order to communicate the fate of those who failed to imitate the patriarch's virtue. Chrysostom mentioned that it was the rich man's failure to emulate Abraham that eventually doomed him.[8]

3. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 19, *PG* 60.593; *Ad populum Antiochenum* 2, *PG* 49.40.

4. *De Lazaro* 2, *PG* 48.990.

5. *Ne timueritis cum dives factus fuerit homo (homiliae 1-2)*, *PG* 55.506. John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 3 vols. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2003), 3:95–96. Aideen Hartney observes that, like Ambrose's reference to the patriarchs of the Old Testament, "Chrysostom's use of these *exempla* is intended to shame his audience into better behavior so that they may not be outstripped by Old Testament characters who were, after all, Jews." Aideen M. Hartney, *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City* (London: Duckworth, 2004), 80.

6. *De sanctis Bernice et Prosdoce*, *PG* 50.635. It is difficult to overstate the frequency and intensity of the appeals Chrysostom made to his flock to imitate Abraham. In one of his homilies on Genesis he addresses his congregation saying, "I beseech you, take care to follow in the footsteps of this patriarch by practicing virtue and so be in a position to be awarded the same crown as his, to be transported into his bosom, to escape punishment in hell and to be judged worthy of those good things beyond all telling." *In Genesim* 42, *PG* 54.387. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 3 vols., Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 2:421. Similar appeals to "imitate the blessed Abraham" [μιμήσασθε τὸν μακάριον Ἀβραὰμ] are made in Chrysostom's homilies on Lazarus, the Psalms, Paul's epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Colossians, various letters, and commentaries on the saints.

7. Gen. 14:14. *Vidua eligatur*, *PG* 51.334. Amanda Berry Wiley observes with regard to Chrysostom's commentary on the history of the early church that John believed that "[t]he earliest Christians are not just saints to be admired and imitated, but ancestors who are organically linked to the saints of later years." The statement is equally valid for the Israelite saints whom John saw as proto-Christians. See Amanda Berry Wylie, "The Exegesis of History in John Chrysostom's Homilies on Acts," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 68.

John is also quick to note that although the rich man calls Abraham "father" and the patriarch refers to the rich man as "son," the implied familial relationship is meaningless. It is only in imitation of the exemplar that true benefit can be derived from their life.

The imitation of exemplars was rooted in the Greek philosophical tradition in general and Stoicism in particular. Aristotle noted that an individual first learns through imitation of others and that the objects of imitation are men of action.[9] In Abraham, Chrysostom found such a man of action and his systematic description of the patriarch's virtue was intended to fashion a fitting portrait of the aged exemplar as part Stoic sage and part Christian saint. In some ways, Abraham was more than this for Chrysostom. Abraham was not just the embodiment of one, two, or several virtues but rather the embodiment of *all* virtue. John argues that in this way Abraham shows that attaining virtue is possible because it would be impossible to emulate dozens of saints who each possessed a different virtue, but since Abraham possessed every virtue, one simply has to imitate him.[10]

The encomiastic style of Chrysostom's homilies in general and his references to Abraham in particular are clearly evident in the manner in which he presents Abraham as a model to imitate. This presentation, in which an encomium ends with a call to imitate the life of its subject, is reminiscent of the funeral oration or *epitaphios logos* [ἐπιτάφιος λόγος].[11] Chrysostom thus applied Abraham in a variety of pastoral settings in which the patriarch's actions demonstrated proper Christian behavior.

2. A Model Child

There is a famous midrashic legend that claims Abraham's father Terah was not simply an idolater but also an idol maker, and when Abraham was a young child he destroyed all of the idols in his father's workshop. It is indeed a pity that this story did not find its way into Chrysostom's homilies, for it would have fit quite nicely if it had. As an Antiochene exegete, Chrysostom was not one to drift too far afield from the scriptural text. This does not mean, however, that he never embellished or stretched the narrative to suit the needs of his topic or his audience—especially if this meant contextualizing the narrative to the tastes

8. *De Lazaro* 6, *PG* 48.1036; *Epistula ad Cyriacum*, *PG* 52.683.

9. Aristotle, *Poetica* 1.

10. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 35, *PG* 61.302.

11. Harry M. Hubbell, "Chrysostom and Rhetoric," *Classical Philology* 19, no. 3 (1924): 270.

of his fourth-century Antiochene congregation. In his discussion of Abraham's youth, Chrysostom presented an obedient servant of God, even at a young age.

As mentioned in the second chapter, Chrysostom held to the Eastern (and Jewish) understanding that Terah was in fact an idolater. Abraham's achievements were more profound because he had no one to emulate, not even his father.[12] Without the benefit of religion or teacher or even a pious parent, Abraham nevertheless managed to find God through his virtue. Indeed, in Chrysostom's presentation, Terah is so moved by his son's vision that he agreed to join him in the migration to Canaan.[13] Terah, however, was still a worshiper of idols, and Chrysostom believed that God would have destroyed him had his son Abraham not been part of the divine economy.[14] Nevertheless, Terah was not permitted to enter Canaan because he was unworthy.[15] Such was the wisdom of God that Abraham's parents, even though they were idolaters, were inspired by God to name their son Abram, which Chrysostom identifies as meaning "traveler"—an indication of his future journey to Canaan.[16]

The virtue of Abraham in his youth was no doubt a useful pastoral tool when catechizing neophytes with questionable backgrounds. Abraham, however, though he lacked education and "had an impious father . . . did not inherit his wickedness" but rather was found worthy to become a "friend to God" [φίλος τῷ Θεῷ].[17] John makes the case to his congregation that true knowledge does not come from formal education or teachers but rather from knowledge that is inherent in our human nature [τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ φύσει γνώσεως].[18] Chrysostom thus used Abraham to combat not only the claims of Jews concerning the truth of the scriptural message but also pagans who claimed to have possession of wisdom.

Chrysostom presented a picture of Abraham in his youth who "from the outset" possessed a virtuous soul and showed "great devotion to his parents."[19] Following such logic, Chrysostom extrapolated that Abraham was an obedient child who loved his parents. "After all," he argues, "it was to be expected that with his devotion to divine things he would have shown respect for his parents

12. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos*, *PG* 63.160.

13. *In Acta apostolorum* 15, *PG* 60.121.

14. *De paenitentia* 7, *PG* 49.324.

15. *In Acta apostolorum* 15, *PG* 60.121.

16. *In Genesim* 39, *PG* 53.364. Hill notes that Chrysostom's identification of "Abraham's intriguing agnomen as 'traveler'" confirms "that he is ignorant of Hebrew." Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:380.

17. *In Matthaeum* 8, *PG* 57.90.

18. *In Genesim* 36, *PG* 53.333.

19. Ibid.

and won his father over to a loving frame of mind, and thus become the cause of his moving from there."[20] It was only because of Abraham's love for his father that Terah consented to leave his country and go to a far-off land. Even though by the time he left Chaldea, Abraham was a man of some seventy-five years, the virtue of his youth and devotion to his parents nevertheless bore fruit.

It is significant that Chrysostom mentions Abraham's youth at all. John was not reluctant to fill in missing gaps in the scriptural story and synthesize conclusions where he felt appropriate. No doubt, John felt compelled to complete his depiction of Abraham as a model of virtue by drawing what he must have seen as very sensible conclusions from the scriptural story. To be sure, John does not venture too far in the conclusions he draws—extrapolating Abraham's obedience to his parents from the obedience he showed to God later in his life. Elsewhere, Chrysostom offered instruction on how children should behave: "Let children hearken to this, that whenever they are undutiful to their parents, they deserve to be servants. Such a child strips himself of his nobility of birth; for he who rebels against his father is no longer a son; and if he who rebels against his father is not a son, how shall he be a son who rebels against our true Father? He has departed from his nobility of birth, he has done outrage to nature."[21] John could not resist describing the young Abraham's behavior in a manner consistent with his own view of proper youthful conduct.

Such a presentation of Abraham as a virtuous child is also consistent with the framework of the encomium that stressed the importance of describing the circumstances of youth. Certainly, Chrysostom's congregation would have expected some indication as to how the great patriarch, to whom Chrysostom constantly referred, developed into such a great hero of scripture. Chrysostom took what meager data he had and worked with it to fill in the missing spaces and fulfill the structural requirements of his oration.

The presentation of Abraham as a child was pastorally beneficial in that it helped John articulate his views on the education of youth—a topic that was near and dear to his heart.[22] While John was obviously not opposed to Greek *paedeia* he was still, to some degree, in competition with this system and endeavored to show the supremacy of Christian education. Abraham's example was useful in that he not only accomplished such virtuous acts without the benefit of a classical education but also was more virtuous than those with such wisdom.[23] In this way Abraham became a useful model for parents raising

20. Ibid.

21. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 22, *PG* 62.157 (*NPNF1* 13.159).

22. *De inani gloria et de educandis liberis*, *SC* 188.

23. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 26, *PG* 60.641.

their children in what Chrysostom called "the pagan world about us"[24] and for children who may have been enamored with that world.

3. A Model Parent

Abraham, the faithful and obedient child, was also the wise and just parent. As the father of many nations, Abraham is presented by Chrysostom as a loving and considerate patriarch who cared deeply for those in his tent. Chrysostom states that, with regard to parenthood, "God honored the patriarch Abraham for his concern in this matter, no less than for his other virtues."[25] With regard to the primacy of place he accorded Abraham as a model parent, Vigen Guroian observes that "in order to emphasize the larger ordained purposes and calling of the Christian family, Chrysostom repeatedly returned to the stories of the Abrahamic household."[26] Indeed, it is not an overstatement to say that he regarded Abraham's quality as a parent as one of his greatest virtues. In commenting on Gen. 18:19, he remarked on how "great the degree of his virtue: he does not only receive reward for his own practice of virtue, but he is awarded generous recompense for the instruction he gave his children.[27] And rightly so; after all, from then on he proved an instructor of everyone."[28] It was important for John to present Abraham as a virtuous parent, not only to fulfill the categories of virtue but also to enhance the credentials of a man to whom John referred as the father and teacher of Christians.

Toward this end, Abraham is presented as a fair and just father to all those under him, which included family members and servants. Chrysostom noted that Abraham was kind and beneficent to his nephew Lot.[29] Such was Abraham's virtue as a parent that "the whole house was harmoniously knit together" and all were "interested in the same things."[30] In John's pastoral

24. *De inani gloria et de educandis liberis*, *SC* 188.3.

25. *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae*, *PG* 47.355.

26. Vigen Guroian, "Family and Christian Virtue in a Post-Christendom World: Reflections on the Ecclesial Vision of John Chrysostom," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (1991): 334.

27. Rudolf Brändle notes that Chrysostom saw the model Christian father as one who regularly instructs his family concerning spiritual matters. Rudolf Brändle, "This Sweetest Passage: Matthew 25:31-46 and Assistance to the Poor in the Homilies of John Chrysostom," in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan R. Holman, *Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 129. Bernard Schlager also discusses Chrysostom's attitude regarding the important role parents play in the education of their children. Bernard Schlager, "Saints Basil and John Chrysostom on the Education of Christian Children," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 36, no. 1 (1991): 49.

28. *In Genesim* 42, *PG* 54.387.

29. *In epistulam ii ad Timotheum*, *PG* 62.638.

homilies, a recurring image is that of the Christian home as a "little church" where all live in harmony. JoAnn Heaney-Hunter notes the Pauline roots of Chrysostom's view of marriage as one in which "[i]f Christian families adhere to the principle that they are *ecclesiolae*, they can be better manifestations of the 'great mystery of marriage' articulated by Paul."[31] The household of Abraham and Sarah is described to fit within this model of order—at least insomuch as John envisions a Christian household to function. In a homily on Ephesians, he explains to his flock that, "If we regulate our households [like Abraham] we will also be fit to oversee the Church, for indeed the household is a little Church [ἡ οἰκία γὰρ 'Εκκλησία ἐστὶ μικρά]. Therefore, it is possible for us to surpass all others in virtue by becoming good husbands and wives."[32]

Thus the home of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and the 318 servants was the preeminent example of such a "little church." Guroian notes that complex social conditions of the fourth century had a profound effect on family life. He observes that "Chrysostom was not without cognizance of this sociological dimension and function of the family." Nevertheless, he adds that Chrysostom "subordinated this social function to a secondary or tertiary consideration. Primary for him was the nature of the Christian family as an ecclesial entity: the family as a vocation of the kingdom of God, obliging a discipline of spiritual and moral *askesis*."[33] As Guroian succinctly puts it, "Chrysostom thought of the Abrahamic household as the ancient biblical type of the Christian 'ecclesial' household."[34]

If the home was indeed intended to function as a small church, then all within Abraham's household had to be treated as full members of the patriarch's family. Abraham, according to John, did not treat his servants like slaves but rather like children.[35] In return, Abraham's servants would have gladly laid down their lives for their master. That Abraham treated his servants in the same manner as he treated his own offspring was a not-so-subtle reference that had obvious associations for John's gentile congregation.

30. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 20, *PG* 62.143 (*NPNF1* 13.148).

31. JoAnn C. Heaney-Hunter, "'Disobedience and Curse' or 'Affection of the Soul'?: John Chrysostom, Marriage, and Sin," *Diakonia* 24, no. 3 (1991): 180.

32. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 20, *PG* 62.143. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, trans. Catherine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 57.

33. Guroian, "Family and Christian Virtue in a Post-Christendom World: Reflections on the Ecclesial Vision of John Chrysostom," 328.

34. Ibid., 331.

35. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 22, *PG* 62.157 (*NPNF1* 13.159).

The patriarch's compassion extended also to the son he bore with the maidservant Hagar. Abraham "was affectionate and well disposed towards Ishmael" and saw Sarah's request that Hagar and her son leave as "severe, harsh, repugnant, and offensive."[36] Although Chrysostom clearly (and aggressively) defended Sarah's actions in expelling Hagar and Ishmael, he still felt the need to express Abraham's pain as a father at his separation from his son Ishmael while still in the flower of youth. To be sure, the scriptural text notes that Abraham thought that the call to expel Ishmael and Hagar was harsh.[37] Nevertheless, Chrysostom added his characteristic embellishments to heighten the drama of the scene and also emphasize Abraham's fatherly devotion.

The colorful language Chrysostom used to describe the pain and distress Abraham felt at the expulsion of Ishmael pales in comparison to that which he used to describe the angst of the aged patriarch in the sacrifice of his beloved son Isaac. To magnify the impact of the *akedah*, Chrysostom made sure to highlight the profound fatherly love Abraham had for Isaac both before and during the attempted sacrifice of Isaac. John told his congregation that prior to the journey to Mount Moriah, when Isaac had come of age and was "in the very bloom of youth . . . you could see his father's love for him growing."[38] When the command eventually came from God to sacrifice Isaac, Chrysostom exclaimed, "See how by these very words he kindles more ardently the fire and stirs more brightly the furnace of affection the good man had for Isaac."[39] When Isaac addressed Abraham as "Father," John noted that "the word was sufficient to touch the very heart of the good man."[40]

Abraham, as a father, even shows compassion for the rich man in the scriptural parable. While the rich man had indeed fallen short by not imitating Abraham's virtue, he nevertheless appealed to Abraham as a father, and Chrysostom is quick to emphasize that the patriarch still referred to the man languishing in the flames of torment as "son."[41] Although Abraham shows compassion to the rich man, Chrysostom repeats his refrain that it is not ancestry but virtue that establishes the relationship between a father and his son.

By presenting Abraham as an exemplary father, Chrysostom intended to convey two important messages. First, Abraham is a fair and just ruler with qualities commensurate with the Greek philosophical ideal. Second, Abraham

36. *In Genesim* 46, PG 4.423.

37. Gen. 21:11–12.

38. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.429. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:15.

39. Ibid.

40. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.430. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:18.

41. *De Lazaro* 6, *PG* 48.1036.

is a paternal figure who shows love for his children, which for Chrysostom includes his community of Christians. Chrysostom goes to great lengths to describe the unanimity of thought in Abraham's camp and that all shared one common attitude and one kindred spirit. The principal reason for such an emphasis was to stress that unity is achieved by a common virtue, not through the bond of familial relations. The purpose of the repeated reference to Abraham's love of his servants and hospitality to strangers (not simply the angelic visitors) was to show that those outside of Abraham's direct family (i.e., Christians) were welcome in the tent of the patriarch.

John also notes Abraham's "affection in the degree of care he takes of his son" when commenting about Sarah's death and his efforts to secure a wife for Isaac.[42] In this instance, he once again extolled the virtue of antiquity [τὸ παλαιὸν] and lamented the decadence of fourth-century Antiochene society. Chrysostom argued that in his contemporary world, parents cared more for their own state of affairs than they did for their children. Abraham, however, was a pastoral model for his flock in that he was more concerned with the well-being of his son Isaac than he was for his own material possessions. In a Platonic sense, he favored the "beauty of the soul and nobility of manners" to the "charm of external beauty" [τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ κάλλος ἐπεζήτουν, καὶ τρόπων εὐγένειαν].[43]

That Chrysostom spent so much time extolling Abraham as a model parent should not come as a surprise. Fourth-century Antiochene and Constantinopolitan society was in a state of profound change as Christianity enjoyed wider acceptance in Roman society.[44] Chrysostom expressed outrage that Christian parents wanted to see their children succeed both in terms of their social status and their material wealth at the expense of their Christian formation.[45] A superficial reading of Chrysostom may lead one to conclude that he saw monasticism as the answer to this problem.[46] While it is true that early in his career John never hesitated to praise the supremacy of the monastic life,

42. *In Genesim* 48, *PG* 54.434. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:25.

43. *In Genesim* 48, *PG* 54.437. Ibid., 3:29.

44. For a discussion of fourth-century Antiochene life and its impact on the Christian household, see Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Lectures on the History of Religions (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 305–22.

45. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 21, *PG* 62.151. John lamented what he saw as the wrongheaded priorities of parents, commenting that, "If a child learns a trade, or is highly educated for a lucrative profession, all this is nothing compared to the art of detachment from riches; if you want to make your child rich, teach him this. He is truly rich who does not desire great possessions, or surround himself with wealth, but who requires nothing." Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, 68–69. See also Schlager, "Saints Basil and John Chrysostom on the Education of Christian Children."

later on in his ministry, as Guroian rightly notes, he was equally emphatic that the health of the church was dependent upon the moral strength and vitality of the Christian family structure.[47] Central to Chrysostom's pastoral vision was the transformation of the city into a society based on a Christian model.[48] Given the relative importance John placed on the upbringing of children in the Christian community, it is understandable why he in no way saw Abraham's virtue limited by the fact that this Old Testament exemplar was both a father and a husband. In comparison with the great philosophical minds of his day, he asks, "How many, who had wives to keep and children to bring up, were inferior in no respect, no, in no respect to those who have been mentioned?"[49] In many ways, Abraham's virtue was enhanced by the fact that he was a parent who achieved such virtue despite the distractions of parenthood.

Abraham provided a useful catechetical tool with which John could describe how he thought an ideal parent should behave. The house of Abraham, arrayed in order and practicing philanthropy, assumed the status of a precursor to the Christian household in which Christians, like Abraham and his family, were prepared to receive Christ into their home.[50] For Chrysostom it was not at all a contradiction that Abraham could be both a model parent and a model ascetic—virtue was virtue irrespective of the environment in which it was practiced.

46. An isolated reading of Chrysostom's *De virginitate* can lead to this misconception of Chrysostom's attitude toward the value of marriage. Douglas O'Roark, however, notes that recent scholarship, which takes a much broader view of Chrysostom's works, indicates that "Chrysostom throughout his numerous sermons and treatises provides anecdotal testimony that he knew his audience would understand regarding the deep love and joy that parents and children shared." O'Roark argues that Chrysostom was a strong advocate for "the continuation of traditional family structure in the fourth-century East," and the evidence in this investigation supports that conclusion. Douglas O'Roark, "Parenthood in Late Antiquity: The Evidence of Chrysostom," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 40, no. 1 (1999): 54–55.

47. Vigen Guroian, "The Ecclesial Family: John Chrysostom on Parenthood and Children," in *Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 66. See also, Margaret A. Schatkin, *John Chrysostom as Apologist with Special Reference to De incomprehensibili Quod nemo laeditur, Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt, and Adversus oppugantores vitae monasticae*, vol. 50, Analekta Vlatadon (Thessalonike: Patriarch. Hidruma Paterikon Meleton, 1987), 277.

48. For an excellent discussion on this pastoral vision see Hartney, *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City*.

49. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 21, *PG* 62.153 (*NPNF1* 13.156).

50. *In Acta apostolorum* 45, *PG* 60.320.

4. A Model Husband

Abraham's relationship with his wife Sarah also exhibited the hallmark of the respect he demonstrated as a child to his parents and the service offered as a father to his children. Chrysostom depicted their marriage as a true partnership and Sarah as anything but a submissive wife to the great patriarch. He describes their marriage as functioning in a manner similar to that of the family as a whole—as one of perfect harmony. Chrysostom presents Abraham as the eternally devoted husband who "so loved her, that in all things he obeyed her commands."[51] A prominent example of such obedience is the aforementioned expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael. When Sarah demanded that Hagar and Ishmael leave their home, Abraham showed great restraint and did not take issue with Sarah.[52]

Having said this, Chrysostom also portrayed Sarah as demonstrating the utmost respect for her husband. Sarah agreed to follow her husband and "was pleased with all things that were done by him."[53] John contrasted Sarah's respectful demeanor with the behavior of the women of his day. These women, he claimed, called their husbands "fools and senseless and unmanly and traitors and stupid" when they lowered themselves as Abraham did.[54]

The hospitality shown to the three angelic visitors provided Chrysostom with another opportunity to display the perfect partnership of Abraham's marriage. The event of Abraham's hospitality is called by John a "spectacle" and a "classroom [which] is open to both sexes."[55] Chrysostom, as always, seized the opportunity to make a pastoral observation—in this case, about marriage. He called on men and women in the congregation "to listen and imitate" as he gave the following pastoral observation: "They divide the labor so as to divide also the crown. Married life is in common; let the works of virtue also be in common. I received you as a helpmate; be a helpmate to me also in higher things."[56] Even when making such a pastoral point, Chrysostom cannot resist

51. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 20, *PG* 62.143 (*NPNF1* 13.148). Such a depiction of Abraham and Sarah as the loving couple is consistent with Chrysostom's vision of marriage in which "through the physical union and loving communion of male and female, parents pass on the image and likeness of God to their offspring." Guroian, "The Ecclesial Family: John Chrysostom on Parenthood and Children," 67. With regard to Abraham's affection for Sarah, Hartney also notes that Chrysostom "admires the respect with which Abraham always treated Sarah, even when she was unable to provide him with an heir." Hartney, *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City*, 79.

52. *In Genesim* 46, *PG* 54.423.

53. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 26, *PG* 61.221 (*NPNF1* 12.155).

54. Ibid.

55. *Ne timueritis cum dives factus fuerit homo1*, *PG* 55.506. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, 96.

the opportunity to once again emphasize his view that Abraham was a father to all who participate in his virtuous way of life. Sarah's choice to help her husband serve the guests rather than complain that the servants should have performed such a task is evidence for John that "she was Abraham's wife, not only by a relationship of body but also by a sharing in virtue."[57]

One should not take for granted that Sarah was also presented as a model of virtue along with her husband Abraham. The Old Testament narratives and prophetic works, as Lynda Coon indicates, "reflect ancient gender precepts of carnality as feminine and spirituality as masculine."[58] Chrysostom often lamented that the women in his community were seeking after gold and were adorning themselves with the precious metal.[59] In Chrysostom's references to Abraham, however, Sarah appears as a woman of one mind with her husband who rejects wealth and extravagances—a trait that Chrysostom was less willing to associate with the women of his fourth-century urban society than he was with the heroines of the Old Testament.

Although Abraham and Sarah showed mutual love, respect, and devotion, neither loved the other more than God. John, once again, mourned that his contemporary society was "declining downward" and that husbands loved their wives more than God and vice versa.[60] Abraham, though, proved himself to be the ideal husband since he was devoted to his wife but favored God more—evidence of which was the *akedah*. John did not gloss over the fact that Abraham concealed from Sarah his intent to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham, says John, did not want to "defile [the sacrifice] with tears, or with any opposition."[61] Despite all of John's pastoral observations about Abraham's love for his children, his servants, and his wife, he consistently states that the patriarch's relationship

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity*, Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 30.

59. In an extended commentary on the evils of wealth in general and the love of gold in particular, Chrysostom expresses his dismay at the affection women in his congregation have for gold, saying, "I am afraid lest, under the impulse of this madness [μανίας], the race of woman should go on to assume some portentous form: for it is likely that they will wish to have even their hair of gold. . . . For if they dare to do what is even more absurd than this, much more, I think, will they long for their hair, and lips, and eyebrows, and every part to be overlaid with molten gold." To be fair to Chrysostom, in the same homily he also condemns men whose pursuit of wealth drives them "senseless and mad." Nevertheless, he sees such madness as a less-than-masculine trait in which the pursuit of wealth makes men act like women. *In epistulam ad Colossenses* 7, *PG* 62.350 (*NPNF1* 13.292).

60. *In epistulam i ad Thessalonicenses* 6, *PG* 62.431 (*NPNF1*, 13.350).

61. *In epistulam i ad Timotheum* 14, *PG* 62.578.

with God had primacy of place. Even if Abraham's natural inclination might have been to behave otherwise, he could not, because he was "drunk with desire" [μεθύων τῷ πόθῳ] to obey God.[62] This zeal to obey God helped Chrysostom explain why some of his pastoral claims were at odds with inconvenient aspects of the scriptural narrative.

One such "inconvenient aspect" was the scriptural incident in which Abraham tells Sarah to pose as his sister rather than his wife so that he can escape death at the hands of Egyptians who are attracted to her.[63] Chrysostom goes to great length to address the concern that Abraham was not fulfilling his duty as a husband in defending his wife's honor. However, he turns the story on its head and presents the event as a showcase for Abraham's wisdom. If, he argues, Abraham had not told Sarah to lie, then he would have been killed and the Egyptians would then be guilty of not one but two crimes—adultery and murder. At the very least, Abraham prevented the sin of murder to take place and "on this point he ought even to have been praised, in that he kept the adulterer's hand clean of blood."[64]

A potential vice is thus turned into an act of virtue. Moreover, Abraham is not only shown to be wise but also to have overcome his natural impulse to attack the Egyptians. A lesser man, Chrysostom argues, "would even gladly have drunk the very blood of the man who abused their wife, and would have chosen to do and suffer anything to this end."[65] While he acknowledges that Abraham's actions were prompted by his fear of death, he nevertheless tells his congregation that the patriarch overcame his passions and used wisdom to arrive at the appropriate course of action. In the final analysis, however, Abraham does not escape totally unscathed since Chrysostom is making a larger point that such Old Testament figures as Abraham, Jacob, and Elijah were afraid of death but Paul and the martyrs of the church were not because they had confidence that Christ had defeated death. Abraham's virtue and qualities were rarely diminished, but when they were it was always in relationship to the Christian narrative. In some ways, his failures could be explained away since he did not have the benefit of the gospel.

62. Ibid.

63. Gen. 12:10–20.

64. *De sanctis Bernice et Prosdoce*, *PG* 50.631. John Chrysostom, *The Cult of the Saints*, trans. Wendy Mayer and Bronwen Neil (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 161.

65. Ibid., 160.

5. A Model Ascetic

Given all that has just been discussed, it seems almost counterintuitive that Chrysostom saw Abraham as a model monk, and even stranger that he considered the patriarch to possess the virtue of a virgin. In the Christian East, as Daniélou mentions, it was quite common for church fathers to associate Abraham with the ascetic life, and Chrysostom was no different.[66] While noting the superiority of virginity over marriage, he contended that virginity was no guarantee of reward and married life was not worthy of condemnation. As proof of this he cited the parable of the ten virgins and noted that five of the virgins were shut out of the feast, which indicated that being a virgin in and of itself did not guarantee a place in paradise. Chrysostom also noted that John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, both of whom were virgins, were destined to reside in the bosom of Abraham who was married.[67] In scripture, he argues, there is no requirement to be a virgin in order to be virtuous. He notes that Abraham and Elijah both led virtuous lives. Abraham, however, achieved his virtue through marriage while Elijah did the same through virginity.[68] As George Bebis correctly observes, Chrysostom's extolling of monasticism is not so much a command that all should live as monks but rather that "worldly glory, wealth, luxury, and greed do not bring about happiness, fame, and fulfillment." In this way, Chrysostom felt free to associate Christian qualities of asceticism such as "humility, wisdom, poverty, and simplicity" with figures from ancient Greece such as Socrates, Plato, Diogenes, and Aristides.[69] To attribute such qualities to a scriptural figure such as Abraham was a much easier association to make.

In the end, Chrysostom believed that virginity does not save nor does marriage condemn, but rather it is the virtues of the soul [ἡ λοιπὴ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρετὴ] or lack thereof that determine the state of someone such as Abraham, who "was eager to achieve the virtues of virginity, by which I mean decorum and devotion."[70] Indeed, in Chrysostom's eyes, Abraham exceeded the monastics of the fourth century, for "he spurned wealth and possessions even with a wife, and he triumphed over pleasure more than those observing virginity."[71] So clear was the association that Abraham was living as a proto-

66. See Chapter Two, n. 49.

67. *De virginitate*, *SC* 125.82.

68. *In epistulam ad Philippenses* 12, *PG* 62.274.

69. George S. Bebis, "Saint John Chrysostom: On Materialism and Christian Virtue," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32, no. 3 (1987): 230.

70. *De virginitate*, *SC* 125.82.

71. Ibid.

monastic that Chrysostom described his dwelling place as a "hut" [τὴν καλύβην] rather than a tent.[72] Abraham's hut is transformed into a dwelling that is the very model of monastic simplicity. He notes that "the lodging was rudely prepared, but it was more illustrious than the halls of kings."[73] Though Abraham lived in a region featuring handsome and extravagant buildings and fertile land, his hut in contrast was "mean and small."[74] Even though Abraham lived in such rich surroundings, he remained to Chrysostom "a citizen of the desert" [τὸν δὲ τῆς ἐρήμου πολίτην Ἀβραὰμ].[75] Abraham, as Chrysostom's proto-Christian monk, "had no care about dress" and demonstrated contempt for "the things of this world," living a life in the world and yet out of the world.[76]

Chrysostom, utilizing such monastic conventions, presented Abraham as a pastoral model of the monastic life. In a manner that brings to mind Gregory of Nyssa's description of Moses' ascent into the cloud of darkness, John describes Abraham's ascent up Mount Moriah as a similar retreat from the world and ascetic endeavor. In Chrysostom's view, the entire *akedah* is thus transformed into a metaphor for the ascetic life. As Abraham went up the mountain without Sarah or his servants, he tells his congregation, "Neither then do thou suffer any of the slavish and ignoble passions to be present unto thee, but go up alone into the mountain where he went up, where no second person is permitted to go up."[77] The servants thus represent the human passions, which one is to leave at the base of the mountain. Isaac represents virtue, which is the only thing an individual should bring with them when he is engaged in the spiritual life. Once at the top of this spiritual mountain, he instructs his flock to build an altar, "sacrifice confession" [κατάθυσον ἐξομολόγησιν], and "sacrifice contrition of heart" [κατάθυσον συντριβὴν καρδίας].[78] These sacrificial victims do not become ash but rather result in a contrite heart.

Abraham as a model ascetic is directly related to Chrysostom's understanding of the patriarch as a man who outstepped nature [ἔξω τῆς

72. *Vidi dominum (homiliae 1–6)*, *SC* 277.4.

73. *Ad populum Antiochenum* 2, *PG* 49.40 (*NPNF1* 9.349).

74. *Ad populum Antiochenum* 17, *PG* 49.177 (*NPNF1* 9.456).

75. Ibid. E. G. Clark notes that Chrysostom often extolled the simplicity of country living in contrast to that found in the cities where sin was more likely to be found. In this way, John praises "the angelic country life and the deep spirituality of rustic ascetics" and "uses an idealized account of rustics to rebuke the self-indulgence of his urban audience." E. G. Clark, "Pastoral Care: Town and Country in Late-Antiquity Preaching," in *Urban Centers and Roral Contexts in Late Antiquity*, ed. Thomas S. Burns and John W. Eadie (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 275.

76. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 24, *PG* 63.168 (*NPNF1* 14.474).

77. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 5, *PG* 61.432.

78. Ibid.

φύσεως γενόμενος]. It was this principal virtue that Chrysostom turned to repeatedly in describing Abraham as the prototypical monk whose first rule is obedience. In order to obey God the individual first had to deny his own natural inclinations. There certainly was plenty of material in the Abrahamic narratives to convey such a message. Whether or not Abraham exhibited the general characteristics of a virgin Christian monk was immaterial. Indeed, Chrysostom even excuses Abraham and other figures of the Old Testament such as Noah and Isaac from the practice of virginity because "virginity was so burdensome that none of the ancients could practice it."[79] The Christians of Antioch, however, had no such excuse and were held to a higher standard by their pastor.

Chrysostom, in describing the nature of virginity, associates the virtue of virginity with the virtue of the body. While he extols the "virtue of virginity," he recognizes the difficulty of living such a life "because to bridle the body is a great matter."[80] Abraham, and other figures of the Old Testament, therefore provided an alternate model of virtue for his congregation to emulate, so that if it was not possible that all achieve the virtue of Paul then at least they could attain that of Abraham, who was married, had a home and a family, and possessed wealth. No doubt, there were more potential candidates to be Abraham in the church in Antioch than there were those likely to be Paul.

6. A Model of Philanthropy

The rejection of wealth and material possessions and care for those in need was an essential component of John's image of Abraham as a monastic exemplar. Just as it surely must have seemed counterintuitive that a married man could have the virtue of a celibate monk, so too did it seem ironic that the wealthy Abraham could be the very image of monastic poverty. Yet Chrysostom constantly made reference to Abraham's wealth. Interacting with his congregation he asked, "So what of Abraham? He was rich; surely I do not have to convince you of this? Was Abraham rich? Yes, he was rich. Did you take note of his wealth?"[81] Throughout his references to the patriarch there certainly could be no question in the minds of the faithful whether or not Abraham possessed great wealth.

79. *De paenitentia* 3, *PG* 49.296. John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom: On Repentance and Almsgiving*, trans. Gus George Christo, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 35.

80. Ibid.

81. "Τί οὖν ὁ Ἀβραάμ; Πλούσιος ἦν. Μὴ ἐφιλονείκησά σοι; Πλούσιος ἦν ὁ Ἀβραάμ; Ναὶ, πλούσιος ἦν. Εἶδες αὐτοῦ τὸν πλοῦτον;" *Ne timueritis cum dives factus fuerit homo (homiliae 1-2), PG* 55.505. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, 3:95.

Chrysostom, however, carefully crafted an image of Abraham as a man of great wealth who rejected his material possessions in favor of a life of poverty and philanthropy.[82] John resorted to his typical, hyperbolic language to describe Abraham as a man of exceeding wealth but was quick to note that the patriarch was not well known for his wealth but rather "for his hospitality, for his contempt of riches, for his chastened conduct" [ἀπὸ τῆς φιλοξενίας, ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν χρημάτων ὑπεροψίας, ἀπὸ τῆς κοσμιότητος].[83] Indeed, he stressed that Abraham did not just reject wealth but hated and despised it.[84]

Although Abraham had disdain for wealth, he put the wealth that he had to good use. One ought to keep in mind that, although Chrysostom often railed against wealth, he still had wealthy congregants who were, no doubt, less inclined to the monastic life. Perhaps in a nod to these members of his congregation, Chrysostom mentioned that Abraham "sustained no harm from his wealth" but rather employed it "for the relief of others, alleviating the pangs of the needy and opening their house to every stranger."[85] It was not a sin to be rich, but it was a sin for the rich not to share their wealth with the poor. Thus, even though Chrysostom continually condemned the practices of the richer member of his society, his general concern was not the possession of wealth but rather the proper distribution of that wealth to those in need. In another sermon, he condemns those who have riches "not because riches are a sin: the sin is in not distributing them to the poor, and in the wrong use of them."[86]

A prominent theme in Chrysostom's sermons on philanthropy was that assistance should be given by the almsgiver to those who seek it or those who ask for it, without question.[87] In keeping with this theme, Chrysostom presented Abraham as a philanthropist who "did not inquire of those who were going by who they were and where they came from, as we do now; he simply

82. Francine Cardman makes the observation that, "Stoic arguments abound in regard to the nature of poverty and riches, as well as the way each relates to freedom and slavery, the good life and misery." Francine Cardman, "Poverty and Wealth as Theater: John Chrysostom's Homilies on Lazarus and the Rich Man," in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan R. Holman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 167.

83. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 21, *PG* 62.153 (*NPNF1* 13.156).

84. Chrysostom declares that "[t]he patriarch's contempt for material wealth was intense" [Πολλὴ τοῦ πατριάρχου ἡ περὶ τὰ χρήματα ὑπεροψία]. *In Genesim* 35, *PG* 53.328. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:317.

85. *In Genesim* 66, *PG* 54.571. Ibid., 3:263.

86. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 13, *PG* 61.113 (*NPNF1* 12.76).

87. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 24, *PG* 63.168 (*NPNF1* 14.474). Also, *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 34, *PG* 61.294 (*NPNF1* 12.207) where Chrysostom notes that "Abraham possessed wealth for all strangers, and for all in need."

welcomed all who were passing by. For if you wish to show kindness, you must not require an accounting of a person's life, but merely correct his poverty and fill his need."[88] The frequency of such references noting that charity should be given without qualification suggests that Chrysostom's flock was, at least in his eyes, overly selective in choosing to whom philanthropic assistance should be given.

Chrysostom used Abraham once again as a model of virtue to correct the deficiencies he perceived in contemporary society. In John's opinion, his flock had grown too reluctant in giving alms from the wealth with which they had been blessed. He presented Abraham to them as one who was not content to simply tend to the needs of the poor that came to him, "but going forth he looked around wherever there chanced to be a stranger, or a poor man, in order that he might succor poverty."[89] Abraham's philanthropy was so great that he gave all of his wealth to the poor, "alleviating the pangs of the needy"[90] and thus became an image of a man who followed Christ's command to give all he had to the poor and follow him.[91] Chrysostom fervently believed that it was incumbent upon the wealthy to distribute their wealth to those in need. This belief is perhaps best exemplified by his famous admonition that "failure to share one's own goods with others is theft and swindle and fraud."[92] By Chrysostom's own standard, Abraham would have been nothing more than a thief had he not actively sought out the needy in order to distribute his wealth to them.

While Chrysostom saw in Abraham a model of monastic simplicity and poverty—a man who gave all he had to those in need, impoverished himself, and lived a life of simplicity in his hut—he also saw the patriarch as a model for the wealthy of his community to emulate. Just as Abraham demonstrated that married men could be as virtuous as a virgin, so too did the patriarch show that the wealthy could also be virtuous and be saved. John asks the rhetorical question, "What then? Is it possible for a rich person to be saved?" and the answer is an emphatic "Certainly!"[93] The problem for Chrysostom is

88. *De Lazaro* 2, *PG* 48.989. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 52.

89. *Ad populum Antiochenum* 2, *PG* 49.40 (*NPNF1* 9.349).

90. *In Genesim* 66, *PG* 54.571. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:263.

91. *In illud Isaiae: Ego dominus deus feci lumen*, *PG* 56.147.

92. "ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ μὴ μεταδιδόναι ἑτέροις, καὶ τοῦτο ἁρπαγὴ καὶ πλεονεξία καὶ ἀποστέρησίς ἐστι." *De Lazaro* 2, *PG* 48.987–88. Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, 49.

93. *Ne timueritis cum dives factus fuerit homo (homiliae 1-2)*, *PG* 55.505. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, 3:94. In this homily, Chrysostom offers the refrain, "Do not be afraid when a person becomes rich" [Μὴ φοβοῦ, ὅταν πλουτήσῃ ἄνθρωπος].

not wealth or marriage or power or poverty; the problem is sin. If the affluent, such as the rich man in the parable of Lazarus, find themselves in the flames of condemnation it is not simply because of their wealth "but on account of their own lack of sense."[94]

Abraham's hospitality to the three angelic visitors provided the supporting framework for John's pastoral use of the patriarch as a model of philanthropic virtue. If Abraham had not provided assistance to all those who came by his home, Chrysostom reasoned, then he never would have had the opportunity to receive the angelic visitors. Abraham, however, "cast a wide net of hospitality" and received the guests "without knowing their identity."[95] John urged his flock to be like Abraham and extend charity to all so that even in offering charity to the unworthy they might have the possibility of receiving the worthy or even "have the good luck of such a wonderful catch" and receive God into their homes.[96]

Whereas Abraham waited for all who might require sustenance, the angels, for their part, were attracted to the patriarch's "abundant virtue" [πολλῷ πλείονα εὕρωσιν ἀρετὴν].[97] What the angels found was a man who, although "having a wife and bringing up children," lived a life of monastic simplicity and disregarded the flesh.[98] They entered the hut of the proto-monk Abraham and sat with him at a table "pure from all covetousness, and full of self-denial."[99]

The reward for such hospitality was the blessing of God. John promised the members of his church that they would be sanctified if they emulated the patriarch's philanthropy.[100] Chrysostom used Abraham's actions at Mamre as the source material from which to paint a graphic image of the patriarch as a philanthropist in the Christian mold. As a result of Abraham's philanthropy to

94. *In illud Isaiae: Ego dominus deus feci lumen*, *PG* 56.147. Ibid., 2:32.

95. *In Genesim* 41, *PG* 53.378–79. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:407. See also *In epistulam ad Romanos* 21, *PG* 60.606 and *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 11, *PG* 63.96.

96. *In Genesim* 41, *PG* 53.379. Ibid., 2:408. See also *In Joannem* 60, *PG* 59.335 where John states, "For as Abraham, by entertaining even common guests, once met with Angels, so shall we meet with great men too, if we make the action a business."

97. *In Matthaeum* 69, *PG* 58.653 (*NPNF1* 10.406).

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.

100. *In epistulam i ad Timotheum* 14, *PG* 62.573. Blake Leyerle notes that Chrysostom's appeal to the wealthy members of his community to become philanthropists was essentially based on the rationale that "almsgivers would find on the day of judgment that they had secured for themselves the most effective of patrons." This message was all part of "a strenuous effort to redirect the wealth of his congregation." Blake Leyerle, "John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money," *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 1 (1994): 40.

the angelic visitors, Abraham had received not simply the blessings of God but also the great gift of his son Isaac, whom John referred to as "the one born of the meal" [τὸ ἀπὸ τῆς τραπέζης τεχθὲν] and "the fruit of hospitality" [ὁ τῆς φιλοξενίας καρπὸς].[101] John added that "it was not so much the womb that produced [Isaac] as the meal, though the word of God before everything else."[102] Thus blessings would similarly come to the Antiochene Christians who imitated this virtue of hospitality. Abraham fulfilled the Christian philanthropic ideal because he sold all that he had and gave it to the poor, and when he received the least of his brethren he received God.[103] For Chrysostom, Abraham was more than just a model philanthropist; he was a model Christian. The lesson to fourth-century Christians was clear—if they extended hospitality to others they would also receive the blessings of God. All of the blessings that Abraham, his family, and his household obtained were a result of the charity they had extended to others. It was therefore incumbent on all those living within the household of Abraham to possess the same philanthropic virtue as that of the patriarch who was their leader. Chrysostom notes that Abraham's servant, who searched for a wife for Isaac, understood how important it was that the woman he brought back to live in Abraham's tent be as hospitable as the patriarch and the members of his household. The servant's encounter with Rebecca at the well was a test "to distinguish the maiden's hospitality from her attitude"; she needed to exhibit "similar qualities to those of the good man" in order to be a suitable wife for the patriarch's son.[104]

7. Conclusion

For Chrysostom, Abraham's pastoral significance went beyond his function as a model for general imitation. It is clear from the evidence presented in this chapter that Abraham's true pastoral value was as a model Christian. While Chrysostom advocated the monastic life as an ideal, he was also a pastor who needed to minister to his community, which was, at the end of the day, a congregation and not a monastery. As a father and husband Abraham proved more useful than Paul as a pastoral model, and the numerous pastoral applications presented bear this out. Abraham's virtue was a lived virtue with which both Chrysostom and his congregants could identify.

101. Literally, "the one born of the table." *Ne timueritis cum dives factus fuerit homo (homiliae 1-2)*, *PG* 55.509. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, 3:101.

102. Ibid.

103. Matt. 19:21; 25:40.

104. *In Genesim* 48, *PG* 54.438. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 32.

Abraham served the homilist as a model monastic while still maintaining his integrity as a family man. In this way Abraham was even more useful as a pastoral resource for John since he demonstrated that the monk's virtue was achievable by all members of a Christian household. If Abraham was a proto-Christian, then Abraham's tent (or "hut") was the proto-Christian household, which served as the gold standard of familial piety in the Chrysostomic corpus. Abraham and his household were a means to an end and the end was, as Peter Brown aptly puts it, "the creation of a new form of urban community through the reform of the Christian household."[105]

Chrysostom used the entire breadth of the Abrahamic narrative to convey the idyllic family life he longed to see his community and city adopt. From the beginning of his life, Abraham was a "friend of God" who overcame the obstacles of his youth in order to be obedient to God's call. As a model to emulate, Abraham was certainly a contradiction in terms—he was old yet strong, uneducated yet wise, married yet possessed monastic virtue.

As a parent, Abraham stood at the center of Chrysostom's vision of a proto-Christian family that was a model of the "little church." Abraham's value as a model to imitate was first tested and proved in the laboratory of his tent in which his family and servants all imitated his virtue. In Chrysostom's sermons, the servants' emulation of the patriarch's virtue created a household of military-like order and harmony. It was also in the household of Abraham that John saw the image of the gentile nations grafted into the olive tree of Abraham's virtue.

In the ideal setting of Abraham's household, Chrysostom identified the antidote to the weaknesses he witnessed in his own community. The Christian model of virtue to which he subscribed seemed to be woefully lacking in his flock. The wealthy members of his congregation, adorned with gold, passed over the poor that huddled around the entryways of his church as they begged for charity.[106] The austerity and philanthropy of Abraham was a drum he beat in response to such excess and lack of concern. Here was a man of great wealth, with a wife, family, and servants who was also a model of monastic simplicity and hospitality.

The ultimate benefit Chrysostom presented to his congregation, should they choose to emulate the example of Abraham he presented, was to enjoy the blessings of Christ at the final judgment and escape the condemnation of the rich man in the scriptural parable of Lazarus. Such a choice was the proverbial

105. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 309.

106. For a description of the conditions of the poor in fourth-century Antioch, see Brändle, "This Sweetest Passage: Matthew 25:31–46 and Assistance to the Poor in the Homilies of John Chrysostom," 128.

carrot and stick that Chrysostom either dangled or brandished depending on the circumstance. In the example of Abraham, Chrysostom furnished his congregation with the exemplary reward that was indeed within its reach.

4

Abraham's Exegetical and Theological Significance

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we discussed John's pastoral understanding of the ways in which Christians should emulate Abraham. In this chapter, we will examine John's theological explanations concerning the results and benefits of such emulation. In this regard, one must be wary of drawing too fine a distinction between John as pastor and as theologian. After all, the majority of John Chrysostom's writings are homilies and therefore pastoral in nature. In the corpus of Chrysostom's works one will not find a treatise titled *On the Trinity* or *On the Holy Spirit* but rather collections of sermons that have been passed down to us with titles such as *On Wealth and Poverty* and *On Marriage and Family Life*. As Robert Carter aptly puts it, "Chrysostom's fundamental interests were pastoral and moral rather than speculative and systematic."[1] It is thus difficult to confuse John's theological expositions with that of the great Alexandrian or Cappadocian fathers. This is not to say, however, that John's homilies and treatises are devoid of theological significance. As a priest and theologian Chrysostom did not hesitate to make various theological points and clarifications when the need arose.[2]

For Chrysostom, pastoral commentary was made within the context of a straightforward scriptural exegesis that provided the framework for his theological forays. John preached at Antioch's cathedral, the Golden Church,

1. Robert E. Carter, "The Future of Chrysostom Studies: Theology and Nachleben," in *Symposion: Studies on St John Chrysostom* (Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, 1973), 129.

2. For a comprehensive overview of the recent scholarship on John Chrysostom's theological outlook, see George Dion Dragas, "Perceptions of John Chrysostom in Contemporary Greek Orthodoxy," in *Chrysostomosbilder in 1600 Jahren*, ed. Martin Wallraff and Rudolf Brändle (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 373–410.

and later in Constantinople at the great church of Hagia Sophia, and followed either a fixed lectionary[3] or, at the very least, a set of prescribed readings that were associated with the various great feasts of the church such as Pascha and Pentecost.[4] The epistolary corpus of Paul and the apostle's direct references to Abraham most certainly helped form John's theological understanding of the patriarch. John's exegesis of that corpus provided a forum for his exposition on the patriarch's theological significance. Chrysostom, however, did not require a direct reference to the patriarch in order to allow him to make a theological point. His theological observations, therefore, could be either methodical, as in his extended homilies on the book of Genesis, or eclectic, as in his letters and homilies on other books of the Old Testament.

The Old and New Testament references to Abraham proved particularly useful in helping John articulate his soteriological and eschatological outlook. As we saw in Chapter Three, John preached to his flock that if they simply emulated Abraham's virtue, then they would secure future rewards in paradise. John embedded his salvation theology in his pastoral homilies on the Abrahamic narrative in general and the hospitality shown at Mamre in particular as a way to convince his flock that their pursuit of a life of virtue (or failure to do so) had profound implications.

John at times resorted to conventional Christian typological associations, most especially in his treatment of the *akedah* and its obvious associations with the crucifixion. His natural Antiochene inclination, however, eschewed the allegorical and looked to the scriptural text itself for any direct theological meaning. The Genesis narrative account certainly provided ample material from which he could make theological comments on discrete topics such as the nature of the priesthood and the unity of the Old and New Testament. Competing "heretical" viewpoints such as those of Marcion, Jewish contemporaries, or even pagan Greeks often provided the motivation for John's theological observations. John no doubt saw both a pastoral component in his

3. The exact nature of the lectionary in use during Chrysostom's time and its similarity to later Byzantine lectionaries is an open question. Chrysostom frequently mentions that he offers his sermons on the "lesson of the day," which seems to indicate that there was some form of prescribed readings that he followed. See Carroll D. Osburn, "The Greek Lectionaries of the New Testament," in *Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 63. For a more skeptical view of Chrysostom's use of a prescribed lectionary, see Barbara Aland and Kurt Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 168.

4. Chrysostom comments on his love of Paul and the opportunity he has to preach from his epistles on feasts of the martyrs. "As I keep hearing the Epistles of the blessed Paul read, and that twice every week, and often three or four times, whenever we are celebrating the memorials of the holy martyrs, gladly do I enjoy the spiritual trumpet . . ." *In epistulam ad Romanos* 1, *PG* 60.391 (*NPNF1* 11.335).

refutation of these heretical positions and one that was consistent with the overall theological message he sought to convey.

With regard to the contemporaneous Jewish community, John offered his theological explanations in order to help buttress his claims that Christians were the true inheritors of the Abrahamic promise and thus the legitimate interpreters of the Old Testament text. The Christological associations Chrysostom saw within the Abrahamic narrative contributed to his overall exegetical presentation of Christians as the true sons of Abraham and Jews as those who had been disinherited, as noted in Chapter Two. In Chapter Five, I will discuss Chrysostom's use of Abraham as an exegetical, theological, and polemical tool in his homiletical debates with the Judaism of his day.

2. The Hospitality: An Eschatological Encounter with Christ

The hospitality Abraham offered the three angelic visitors figures prominently in Chrysostom's exegetical and theological understanding of the patriarch as a model of virtue. Chrysostom, however, viewed the hospitality as both a philanthropic act and an encounter with God that had obvious soteriological implications. These virtuous and soteriological implications were not mutually exclusive but were rather intrinsically linked. It was, after all, Abraham's exceeding virtue, manifested in his philanthropic acts, that attracted God to his tent.[5] Chrysostom proposes that such a man-God encounter was not unique to Abraham but was consistent with other virtuous exemplars of the Old Testament who also possessed virtue. God thus accepted Abraham's hospitality in the same way "that he came to Adam, the way he upbraided Cain, the way he conversed with Noah."[6] Chrysostom argues that after this early period in human history described in Genesis, humans became "unworthy of his converse with them."[7] In this context, Chrysostom presented the hospitality of Abraham to his flock as a model of how the practice of virtue can lead them to a personal encounter with God in their own households and the associated "reward [θησαυρὸν] he received from God for his hospitality."[8]

5. *In Matthaeum* 69, *PG* 58.653 (*NPNF1* 10.406).

6. *In Genesim* 2, *PG* 53.28. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 3 vols., Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 1:31.

7. Ibid.

8. *In Genesim* 41, *PG* 53.378. Ibid., 2:405. Here "reward" is literally "treasure." Hill notes here that, "For Chrysostom, Abraham, like the other major characters of primeval and patriarchal history, is a moral figure conspicuous for that cardinal virtue, *prothumia*, "enthusiasm," as opposed to the capital sin of *rhathumia*, "indifference."

Conspicuously absent from Chrysostom's treatment of the hospitality is any reference to the angels as representative of the Holy Trinity. The *akribeia* of John's exegesis prevented him from making such a typological association.[9] Chrysostom refers to the visitors as "the Lord of all with his angels" [τὸν τῶν ὅλων Δεσπότην μετὰ τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ][10] where "the Lord of all" refers to Christ since, in extending his hospitality, Abraham fulfilled Christ's admonition that "whoever receives the least of my brethren receives me."[11] Therefore, in accord with this interpretive projection, Christ is the one "who talked with Abraham in the tent" [καὶ τῷ Ἀβραὰμ ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ διαλεγόμενος].[12]

The association of the three angelic visitors with the three persons of the Holy Trinity, therefore, would have only diminished the exegetical point Chrysostom was trying to make to his flock: "You see, if we practice hospitality, we shall welcome Christ here and he will, in turn, welcome us in those mansions prepared for those who love him, and we shall hear from him, 'Come my Father's blessed ones, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"[13]

Chrysostom makes a decidedly eschatological correlation to the hospitality by relating it to Christ's description of the separation of the sheep and the goats at the final judgment as given in the Gospel of Matthew. In receiving Christ into his tent in the form of one of the angels, Abraham earned his place in paradise by fulfilling Christ's requirement: "For I was hungry, and you gave me food."[14] No doubt, the parable of Lazarus and the rich man influenced Chrysostom in this regard. For Chrysostom, Abraham's presence in this eschatological parable was by no means a foregone conclusion. In his second homily on the parable, Chrysostom notes that it is "worth inquiring why the rich man does not see Lazarus with any other righteous man." [τί δήποτε οὐχὶ παρ' ἑτέρῳ δικαίῳ τὸν Λάζαρον ὁρᾷ].[15] Abraham's hospitality

9. As we will see in section 2 of this chapter, John is less reluctant to make typological associations with regard to the *akedah* and the crucifixion, although even in the instance of the *akedah*, his typological associations are by no means central to his exegetical and theological conclusions.

10. *In Genesim* 41, *PG* 53.378. Elsewhere, Chrysostom refers to the visitors as "the angels and their Lord" [οἱ ἄγγελοι καὶ ὁ τούτων Δεσπότης]. *In Genesim* 42, *PG* 54.387.

11. Matt. 18:5.

12. *In Joannem* 33, *PG* 59.190 (*NPNF1* 14.115).

13. *In Genesim* 41, *PG* 53.384. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:416. Here, Chrysostom is making reference to the final judgment in Matt. 25:34.

14. Matt. 25:35.

15. *De Lazaro* 2, *PG* 48.988. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 50.

to the angelic visitors provides the answer in Chrysostom's explanation. John tells his congregation that Abraham's philanthropy was the key to salvation since consistent philanthropy eventually leads to receiving angels and Christ as did Abraham. It was not simply that Abraham was hospitable but that he was hospitable to all who came to him; "since he used to receive all, he received even angels."[16]

Abraham's ignorance of the true identity of the guests is central to Chrysostom's message about the hospitality, since "if he had chosen to be curious, he would not have received angels."[17] Indeed if he knew who they were, the entire message would be lost. Abraham demonstrated great humility [ταπεινοφροσύνης][18] and voluntarily placed himself in the role of a servant and regarded the visitors as master even though "he knew not that he was receiving Christ."[19] Since Abraham received the least of his brethren he received Christ himself and was able to enjoy the "fruit of hospitality." Thus in Chrysostom's eyes, Christ's reference to Abraham in telling the parable of Lazarus and the rich man was very understandable. For John, the contemporaneous relevance was clear. Abraham, though rich, received Christ at the hospitality and was now placed with the sheep at the right hand. John contrasts the actions of Abraham at Mamre in the midday sun with those of the rich in his community in his first homily on Psalm 49 when he says, "Compare him, I ask you, with rich people today: where do they sit at midday? In hell. Where do they sit? In the death of drunkenness. Where do they sit? In the public eye, dissolute, drunk, hearts blinded, more brutish than brute beasts. The good man was not like that."[20]

The eschatological image of the hospitality of Abraham thus had direct pastoral relevance to his flock. Demetrios Trakatellis observes that "what Chrysostom describes is not a future eschatological condition, but a present situation."[21] For Chrysostom, the eschatological image of Abraham hosting Christ in his tent was only relevant in that it demonstrates that "human transformation becomes something feasible."[22] However, only philanthropy coupled with humility, of the sort Abraham exhibited, will place salvation

16. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 11, *PG* 63.96 (*NPNF1* 14.422).

17. *In epistulam ad Philippenses* 1, *PG* 62.189 (*NPNF1* 13.188).

18. *In dictum Pauli: Oportet haereses esse*, *PG* 51.256.

19. *In Acta apostolorum* 45, *PG* 60.320 (*NPNF1* 11.277).

20. *Ne timueritis cum dives factus fuerit homo* 1, *PG* 55.506. John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 3 vols. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2003), 95.

21. Demetrios Trakatellis, "Being Transformed: Chrysostom's Exegesis of the Epistle to the Romans," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 36, no. 3–4 (1991): 225.

22. Ibid.

within the reach of Chrysostom's flock. In this way, Chrysostom presented his theology to his flock in a manner that was both personal and imminent.

The practical and pastoral application of Abraham and other scriptural figures was never far from Chrysostom's theological and exegetical discourse. While there was a definite theological dimension to events such as the meeting at Mamre, the events nevertheless communicated certain historical realities that were edifying for the members of his church. Amanda Berry Wylie makes an astute observation when she notes that, "One thing that events and the records of events have in common is their pedagogical function. We can learn from our own experiences and from the experiences of others."[23]

The theological lesson that Chrysostom intended his flock to derive from the experience of Abraham's encounter with the three visitors was that philanthropy had a direct correlation to their salvation. The central figure was Christ, appearing in the form of a poor traveler who gave Abraham the opportunity to earn his salvation "when the Son of Man comes in His glory" by feeding him when he was hungry.[24] In the Genesis narrative, the wealthy Abraham is thus the antithesis of the rich man in Christ's parable in the Gospel of Luke.[25] Indeed, in Chrysostom's exegetical view, the hospitality of Abraham is directly linked to the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Such an association lends an eschatological tone to Chrysostom's interpretation of the Genesis account of the patriarch's reception of the angelic guests. John conceived of the angelic visitation with Christ the Logos at the center of the group as "proclaiming His coming" [τὴν παρουσίαν αὐτοῦ ἀνακηρύττοντα] both at the incarnation and at the eschaton.

In Chrysostom's eyes, the soteriological implications had particular pastoral relevance to the wealthiest members of his flock.[26] The wealthiest members of Chrysostom's congregation, however, often assumed that economic poverty was the result of the poor's laziness, criminality, or moral defects. As Wendy Meyer notes, "In attempting to persuade laypeople that they should give generously to the economic poor, John Chrysostom, like many other preachers of his time, was battling against a widespread and persistent belief system that engendered suspicion and resistance."[27] Chrysostom's presentation of philanthropy as a requirement for salvation was one way in which he addressed this "suspicion and resistance." Rudolf Brändle comments that Chrysostom's

23. Amanda Berry Wylie, "The Exegesis of History in John Chrysostom's Homilies on Acts," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 64.

24. Matt. 25:31.

25. Luke 16:19–31.

26. *In Joannem* 33, *PG* 59.190 (*NPNF1* 14.115).

"bold interpretation of the Matthew passage," in which Christ describes the final judgment (Matt. 25:31–46), represented "a new approach to soteriology." Brändle concludes that "for John there is a close connection between soteriology and ethics."[28]

Chrysostom found in the hospitality of Abraham a way to articulate the major themes of his social ethic. As George Dragas aptly puts it, "[T]he central theme in Chrysostom's social message [is] the mercifulness of love which makes the human being fulfill the horizontal aspect of the Gospel as the corollary to the vertical."[29] Chrysostom communicated to his flock, and particularly its wealthiest members, that when they offered charity and hospitality they emulated not only the philanthropy of Abraham but more importantly the love and mercy of God. Chrysostom frequently mentions that the poor were everywhere throughout the city but were invisible to the wealthy. The wealthy, however, needed the poor in order to earn their salvation. Chrysostom acknowledges that patronage for the poorest members of society by the wealthiest members was not an exclusively Christian concern. As Silke Sitzler notes, "Chrysostom asserts that the traditional Greco-Roman patrons, the wealthy elite, are also the patrons of the Christian community. . . . However, in this system of patronage, in contrast with the traditional Greco-Roman one, it is not society, or the community, that acknowledges the patronage, indeed the wealthy almsgiver should not even look to Chrysostom for recognition, but to God."[30]

Part of Chrysostom's task was community building, and his paradigmatic presentation of Abraham's philanthropy reflects his attempt to meld the poor and wealthy members of his flock into one community. Thus Abraham is shown to care for the lowest servant in his household in the same way he cares for his beloved son. Similarly, Abraham has no problem seeing the "invisible" poor because he actively seeks them out. John explains that in such a

27. Wendy Mayer, "Poverty and Generosity toward the Poor in the Time of John Chrysostom," in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan R. Holman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 158.

28. Rudolf Brändle, "This Sweetest Passage: Matthew 25:31–46 and Assistance to the Poor in the Homilies of John Chrysostom," in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan R. Holman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 138.

29. George Dion Dragas, "The Social Message of St. John Chrysostom," in *Église orthodoxe et société: Le message social des Pères de l'Église, Actes du deuxième colloque de théologie 18 orthodoxe de l'Université de Sherbrooke*, ed. Michel Dion (Sherbrooke, QC: Université de Sherbrooke, 2003), 60.

30. Silke Sitzler, "Identity: The Indigent and the Wealthy in the Homilies of John Chrysostom," *Vigiliae Christianae* 63, no. 5 (2009): 475.

philanthropic environment everyone benefits—the poor receive their material assistance and the wealthy their spiritual rewards.

Thus Chrysostom presented philanthropy, such as that of Abraham at Mamre, as nothing less than a moral and theological imperative for all Christians, but most especially the wealthy. No doubt, the wealthy of Antioch or Constantinople could hardly envisage themselves following the example of the monastic Abraham secluded in his hut as a path to eternal salvation. The image of the wealthy Abraham presiding over a large household and still finding time to seek out those in need, however, had Greco-Roman roots and was eminently well suited to inspire the wealthy to believe that salvation was still possible in spite of their wealth. In many ways, Chrysostom viewed almsgiving as the summit of all virtue and one in which "the almsgiver receives his/her own identity, and it is one charged with honour and status—highly prized accolades in the Greco-Roman world."[31] Abraham's care for others was one of the ways he earned his crown of glory and certainly one of the most practical ways the wealthy could earn their crowns.

3. The Akedah: Crucifixion and Resurrection

John's presentation of the *akedah*, or binding of Isaac, provided him with an opportunity to showcase Abraham's virtuous qualities in attempting the sacrificial act. This presentation contained an examination of the patriarch's state of mind in undertaking such an act (almost to the point of psychoanalysis). Although Abraham acted in private, John placed the patriarch's virtues before the congregation in the most explicit fashion so that they could fully understand what Abraham had to endure in order to submit to God's will and thereby receive the promise that made him the father of the Christian polity.

Throughout his homilies, John's congregation saw "the faithful Abraham" [ὁ πιστὸς Ἀβραὰμ] not only "receive the promise" but also "endure the torture."[32] The entire test by God was a test of Abraham's virtue so that this great virtue of the patriarch could be put on display for all to see. When he describes the testing of Abraham, Chrysostom presents the thoughts of the patriarch through a series of rhetorical questions designed to probe Abraham's thoughts. In reality, Chrysostom simply asks the questions present in the minds of the members of his congregation (or at least the questions John imagined they had), such as, "Why would God bless Abraham with a son at such an

31. Ibid., 478.

32. *Ad Stagirium a daemone vexatum*, *PG* 47.438.

advanced age and then demand his death?" John did not hesitate to provide the appropriate response to such a question on behalf of Abraham.

While the primary emphasis of Chrysostom's exegetical references to the *akedah* pertain to the patriarch's virtue, throughout Chrysostom's sermons there are the natural (and requisite) typological associations of the attempted sacrifice of Abraham's beloved son with the crucifixion of God's beloved son. Chrysostom, though reticent to make typological associations, nevertheless very plainly told his flock that "through this sacrifice, Abraham was pointing toward the saving Passion of the Lord."[33] Despite John's typological reticence, there were crucifixion associations in the *akedah* that were too overt for even an Antiochene like John to overlook. John, however, felt compelled to qualify his typology so that his audience did not assume he was engaging in some form of Alexandrian allegory. In one sermon he describes the obvious typological relationships to the crucifixion and qualifies them: "Some things have two levels of meaning: we both understand them at the material level and take them at an intellectual level, as in the case of the anagogy of Abraham's son: we know the son was offered in sacrifice, and we gather something else contained in the thought by mention of the son, namely, the Cross."[34] Indeed, in attempting to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham had the joy of seeing the "icon of the cross" [ὁ πατριάρχης ἐχάρη βλέπων τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ σταυροῦ].[35] In Homily 47 *On Genesis*, Chrysostom reserves the typological association for the very end of his description of the events surrounding the binding of Isaac when he states that "all this, however, happened as a type of the Cross" [Ταῦτα δὲ πάντα

33. *De paenitentia* 6, *PG* 49.320. John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom: On Repentance and Almsgiving*, trans. Gus George Christo, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 81. In another typological reference, Chrysostom associates the crucifixion with the *akedah* and describes God's intention saying, "He purposed to give His own Son for us; but that He might not seem to bestow a favor, but to be indebted to us, He commanded Abraham to offer his son, that whilst doing a great kindness, He might seem to do nothing great." *In epistulam i ad Thessalonicenses* 2, *PG* 62.405 (*NPNF1* 13.331).Robert Hill describes Chrysostom's hesitancy to make typological associations, noting that "Chrysostom is never reluctant to make an in-depth study of his text, as we have often noted; but recourse to typology is rare with him and discouraged by his school." Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:203.

34. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 47, *PG* 55.209. John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 2 vols. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 1:299. John sees the typological association as prophetic in nature. He makes the distinction between "prophecy that was made with words" and "prophecy that was made with examples." Isaiah's words of "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent" (Isa. 53:7) is representative of the former and Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac of the latter. *De paenitentia* 6, *PG* 43.320.

35. *Pater, si possibile est, transeat*, *PG* 51.36.

τύπος ἐγίνετο τοῦ σταυροῦ].[36] Robert Hill, noting the delay in making such an obvious typological association, observes that it is only after Chrysostom "has in his usual way exhausted the richness of [the text's] literal meaning" that he allows himself to "admit a further level of meaning, the typological."[37]

In explaining the events of the *akedah*, Chrysostom (like the rabbinic exegetes of midrash) was forced to fill in the gaps of the story. In the Genesis narrative, the age of Isaac is indeterminate. Chrysostom is consistent with the general Christian interpretation that viewed Isaac as a young man. Thus John describes Isaac as one who "had come of age and was in fact in the very bloom of youth."[38] Isaac is also compliant with his father's action, which made him a model of obedience like his father. John even questions (at least rhetorically) whether Abraham or Isaac demonstrated greater obedience. "What amazes and astounds me more—the valorous attitude of the patriarch or the obedience of the son? Or the fact that, far from shrinking back or protesting against the deed, he submitted and yielded to what was being done by his father, and, like a lamb, lay on the altar without resistance, awaiting his father's arm?"[39]

Abraham's struggle at the *akedah* helped fulfill the classical, heroic image he fashioned for the patriarch. The struggle was itself part of the Platonic and Stoic model of the virtuous sage who strove for perfection, and in doing so, brought suffering upon himself. At times, this suffering is a result of injustices that the hero must endure. At other times the suffering is simply part of the journey to perfection.[40] The *akedah* was thus the preeminent act with which Chrysostom showcased the virtue of Abraham and brought all of the classical and theological categories of virtue to bear in one narrative scene. God was, after all, putting "the good man's virtue to the test."[41] While Abraham demonstrated courage in many instances, it was in the *akedah*, with "his loins girt and in a state of readiness to sacrifice"[42] that he exhibited even "more courage" [καὶ πλείονα

36. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.432. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:21.

37. Ibid. Nevertheless, while not the main focus of his exegesis, Chrysostom does make reference to the major typological associations such as Isaac as a figure of Christ, Abraham the father offering his beloved son and God the Father offering his beloved son, and Christ as the "rational lamb" who replaces the idolatrous worship of "stone and wood."

38. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.429. Ibid., 3:15.

39. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.431. Ibid., 3:20.

40. ". . . ὁ Χρυσόστομος ἀναπτύσσει, μέ βάση κυρίως πλατωνική καί στωϊκί ἠθικολογία, τήν ιδέα ὅτι τόν σοφό, δηλαδή τόν ἐνάρετο καί ἠθικό, δέν μπορεῖ κανείς νά βλάψει, διότι τίς ἀδικίες τίς ἀντιμετωπίζει γενναῖα καί τίς ἐκμεταλλεύεται γιά τήν τελείωσή του." Stylianos G. Papadopoulos, *Ἅγιος Ιωάννης ο Χρυσόστομος*, 2 vols. (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1999), 2:17.

41. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.430. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:17.

42. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.431. Ibid., 3:20.

ἀνδρείαν ἐπιδειξάμενον].[43] Indeed, according to Chrysostom, from the very first moments when God called out to Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, "Sacred Scripture intends . . . to reveal to us the good man's virtue."[44] In John's presentation, the main point of the story is not only a typological association between Isaac and Christ or the sacrifice and the crucifixion, but rather so that "the people of the time and those from that time until now might be instructed in the same love as the patriarch's and in showing obedience to the Lord's commands."[45]

In order to preserve God's omniscience, John argues that God was not "ignorant of the good man's virtue before this, and only now came to know of it."[46] In a rhetorical move that we have already seen, Chrysostom articulates God's rationale for the *akedah* using the first person in which God states, "My intention in giving this command was not that the deed be completed, nor did I want your boy sacrificed, but rather that your obedience might be plain to all."[47] For Chrysostom, the *akedah* was not principally about Abraham or even the crucifixion. Rather, the attempted sacrifice of Isaac was mainly about the future generations of Christian believers in general and his own flock in particular.

The *akedah* is a story that elicits strong reaction, and Chrysostom was certainly keenly aware of the questions in the minds of the members of his congregation. When John describes Abraham's reaction to God's command to sacrifice Isaac, he lists the reasonable questions Abraham would have asked himself upon hearing such a command, beginning with the very simple, "What is this?" [Τί τοῦτο;].[48] Abraham would have naturally asked why God brought life from an infertile Sarah, promised him that he would be the father of many nations, and then commanded that Isaac, having just reached maturity, be put to death upon the altar of sacrifice. These were all natural questions, but Chrysostom preserved the integrity of Abraham's virtue and explained that "this good man, however, entertained none of these thoughts" [Ἀλλὰ τούτων μὲν οὐδὲν ἐλογίσατο ὁ δίκαιος οὗτος].[49]

Abraham's journey with Isaac and his servants demonstrated Abraham's enthusiasm [προθυμίας] and his heightened desire [ἐπιτεταμένου πόθου] to

43. *De Lazaro* 5, *PG* 48.1024.

44. "Σκόπει μοι τὴν θείαν Γραφὴν, πῶς ἐντεῦθεν ἤδη βούλεται ἐκκαλύψαι ἡμῖν τοῦ δικαίου τὴν ἀρετήν." *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.428. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:14.

45. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.429.

46. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.432. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:21.

47. Ibid.

48. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.429.

49. Ibid. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:17.

follow the command of God.[50] Central to Chrysostom's exegesis of the *akedah* was the patriarch's intent to carry out the mission given to him, however horrific it might be. For Chrysostom, Abraham's intent implies that the patriarch actually sacrificed his son even though he did not in fact kill him. Chrysostom uses explicit language to communicate to his flock that Isaac was indeed sacrificed [ὁ Ἀβραὰμ τὸν υἱὸν κατασφάξας].[51] The only reward Abraham expected was the opportunity "to obey the Lord," and for this reason he "offered his son and slew him" [ἀνήγαγε τὸν υἱὸν καὶ ἔσφαξε].[52] On several occasions, John even refers to the patriarch as not only a "man-slayer" [ἀνθρωποκτόνος] but a "child killer" [παιδοκτόνος].[53]

Despite the numerous references indicating that Abraham had in fact "slaughtered" his son, Chrysostom explains that in reality (and according to scripture) "truly Abraham didn't bloody the knife, didn't redden the altar, didn't sacrifice Isaac, yet completed the sacrifice nonetheless."[54] Chrysostom argues that since Abraham fully intended to kill Isaac, there was no real need for him to carry out the act since God already knew his intent and it was "by intent that he sacrificed [his son]" [τῇ προθέσει ἔσφαξε].[55] Chrysostom never states that Abraham "attempted" to sacrifice his son. In a clear declarative statement John says that Abraham "slaughtered the child" [τὸν παῖδα κατέσφαξεν], but then qualifies this by stating "he slaughtered not by deed but by thought" [ἔσφαξε γὰρ, εἰ καὶ μὴ τῇ πείρᾳ, ἀλλὰ τῇ γνώμῃ].[56]

Therefore, Chrysostom maintains, "the actual sacrifice afterwards [would have been] superfluous and unworthy of God" [Ὥστε περιττὴ λοιπὸν ἦν ἡ σφαγὴ, καὶ ἀναξία Θεοῦ].[57] John explains how a sacrifice can in fact be a sacrifice without the shedding of blood when he postulates God's response to such a question: "I judge such sacrifices not from the outcome of events, but

50. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.430.

51. Lit., "Abraham slaughtered his son." *In epistulam ad Romanos* 10, *PG* 60.478.

52. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 20, *PG* 61.170 (*NPNF1* 12.117). See also *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 41, *PG* 61.360 (*NPNF1* 12.253). "Consider that Abraham slew his own son and neither shed a tear nor uttered a bitter word" [ἐννόησον ὅτι ὁ Ἀβραὰμ κατέσφαξε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν αὑτοῦ, καὶ οὔτε ἐδάκρυσεν οὔτε πικρὸν ῥῆμα ἐξέβαλεν]. Also, *In epistulam i ad Thessalonicenses* 6, *PG* 62.431 (*NPNF1* 13.350). "He said indeed, slay; and he slew him" [Εἶπε γοῦν. Σφάξον· καὶ ἔσφαξε].

53. *De Lazaro* 5, *PG* 48.1021; *In Genesim* 62, *PG* 54.535; *In Matthaeum* 17, *PG* 57.263; *In epistulam ad Romanos* 16, *PG* 60.549; *In epistulam ad Galatas commentaries* 1, *PG* 61.629.

54. *In sanctum Eustathium Antiochenum*, *PG* 50.601. John Chrysostom, *The Cult of the Saints*, trans. Wendy Mayer and Bronwen Neil (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 55.

55. *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt*, *SC* 79.19.8.

56. *Messis quidem multa*, *PG* 63.517.

57. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 3, *PG* 61.415 (*NPNF1* 12.292).

from the disposition of those making the choice. . . . His hand didn't kill, but his will did. He didn't bathe his sword in his child's neck, he didn't slit his throat, yet even without blood it's a sacrifice."[58] For Chrysostom, this was a type of sacrifice without blood [ἡ θυσία χωρὶς αἵματος] of martyrs like Paul who "died every day."[59] Certainly this type of language also called to mind the bloodless sacrifice of the Eucharist.[60] In this sense, Abraham's sacrifice is a type of self-sacrifice on the part of the patriarch. In the end, Abraham does not offer his son as a sacrifice but rather "he sacrificed himself numerous times" [οὐ γὰρ υἱόν, ἀλλ' ἑαυτὸν μυριάκις κατέθυσεν].[61] In this way, Abraham is both priest and father [ἱερέα καὶ πατέρα] and is transformed from a man-slayer and a child-killer to a "lover of his child" [φιλόπαιδα] and a "lover of God" [φιλόθεον].[62]

John also saw resurrectional overtones in his treatment of the *akedah*. Chrysostom explains Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac by saying that the patriarch had faith that God would still fulfill his promise and so "he did not fall into despair."[63] According to John, Abraham's faith was so great that he believed that even if he did indeed kill Isaac upon the altar he was "persuaded that He would also raise him up after he had been slain in sacrifice."[64] He explains Abraham's hope in the resurrection thusly: "[I]f Abraham so many years before, believed 'that God is able to raise from the dead,' much more ought we to believe it. You see (what I at first said) that death had not yet entered in and yet He drew them at once to the hope of the resurrection, and led them to such full assurance, that when bidden, they even slay their own sons, and readily offer up those from whom they expected to people the world."[65]

In summary, while Chrysostom used the *akedah* in a typological fashion that was entirely consistent with the Christian tradition, his primary focus was to describe the event within the context of the overall virtuous model of Abraham he had constructed throughout his homilies. Abraham, as the heroic sage, completes the sacrificial act, even if, as Chrysostom admits, he failed to bloody the blade of his knife or redden the altar. Indeed, the homiletical capital Chrysostom invested in the patriarch demanded that Abraham succeed in his

58. *In sanctum Eustathium Antiochenum*, *PG* 50.601. Chrysostom, *The Cult of the Saints*, 55–56.

59. 1 Cor. 15:31.

60. Indeed, in the Divine Liturgy that bears his name, the priest's prayer at the beginning of the Eucharistic rite speaks of the "bloodless sacrifice [ἀναιμάκτου θυσίας] that is about to be offered."

61. *De laudibus sancti Pauli apostolic*, *SC* 300.1.6.

62. *Vidi dominum* 4, *SC* 277.4.2. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, 2:84.

63. *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt*, *SC* 79.10.17.

64. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 25, *PG* 63.172 (*NPNF1* 14.477).

65. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 25, *PG* 63.173 (*NPNF1* 14.478).

mission. The purpose of the mission was not only the fulfillment of typological or prophetic norms but rather the display of Abraham's great virtue, in order that his faith and obedience could be recognized by future generations that included the flock to whom Chrysostom preached his sermons on the patriarch.

4. Priesthood and Sacrificial Worship

Throughout his writings, Chrysostom was preoccupied with the concept of priesthood. Indeed, it is a convention to refer to Chrysostom as "the priest's priest," but this appellation only tells part of the story. Christian claims to the mantle of Israel, in general, and Chrysostom's polemics directed toward the Judaism of his day, in particular, necessitated an articulation of the Christian understanding of priesthood vis-à-vis that which is found in the Old Testament. Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek and his participation in animal sacrifices and the presentation of Melchizedek in the epistle to the Hebrews aided Chrysostom in this articulation.

Abraham was useful in this regard because, as in other instances, he lived prior to the Sinai covenant and the establishment of the more common and visible aspects of Judaism. Since Abraham lived before the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood, it seemed only natural to John that the priesthood at the time of Abraham had primacy of place in his overarching conception of the scriptural narrative that encompassed both the Old and New Testament. Therefore, in keeping with the tradition established in the epistle to the Hebrews, it is not Aaron or even Abraham who is the preeminent model of priesthood but rather Melchizedek. In his seventh discourse *Against Judaizing Christians*, Chrysostom argues, "[I]n the time of Abraham, before the day of Jacob and Isaac, before the coming of Moses, when the Law had not yet been written, when the priesthood did not clearly belong to the Levites, when there was no Meeting Tent or Temple, before the division of the people into tribes, before Jerusalem existed, before anyone at all had yet taken control of the government among the Jews, there was a man named Melchizedek, a priest of the Most High God."[66] Since Melchizedek was both a priest and a king, John saw him as a type of Christ [τύπος γὰρ ἔμελλεν ἔσεσθαι τοῦ Χριστοῦ][67] and greater than the Levitical priesthood.[68]

66. *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.922. John Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, trans. Paul W. Harkins, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1979), 193.

67. Ibid.

68. Heb. 7:1–28. At one point, John attempts to explain the derivation of Melchizedek's name in Hebrew when he tells his audience that "in the Hebrew language the word *Melchi* means kingdom and

Chrysostom, keeping with the line of thought established in Hebrews, notes that Abraham recognized the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood, when, after rescuing Lot, he gave a tenth of the spoils he had won to the priest-king.[69] For Chrysostom, the meaning of the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek is "to show that our priesthood is much greater than the Jewish priesthood."[70] Chrysostom provides a rationale for this assessment, not by emphasizing the patriarch's Christian credentials (as he so often did in describing the patriarch's virtue) but rather by noting his Jewishness and his connection to the Levitical priesthood. John argues that "Abraham was the ancestor of the Levites and the Jewish priests" and yet nevertheless offered tithes and received a blessing from Melchizedek. Abraham thus had the "rank of layman" [λαϊκοῦ τάξιν ἐπεῖχε] compared to Melchizedek, "who is the type of [the Christian] priesthood."[71] In this way, Abraham, who throughout Chrysostom's works is presented as a model of Christian virtue, becomes a representative of the inferiority of Judaism to Christianity. All of this was meant to show that "the old priesthood had been abolished" [ἡ ἱερωσύνη καταλύεσθαι ἡ παλαιὰ].[72]

Chrysostom, echoing the epistle to the Hebrews, made an obvious conclusion that if "the old priesthood was ended and . . . another much better and more sublime priesthood has been brought in to replace it," then it followed that "another way of life suited to the new priesthood will be brought in and another Law given, and that clearly is ours."[73] The "way of life" to which Chrysostom refers is differentiated from the "prescriptions of the Law," which were "carnal commandments." According to John, Christ ordered the abolishment of both the old priesthood and the sacrificial system and commanded humans to worship God "through the virtue of our souls" [διὰ τῆς κατὰ ψυχὴν ἀρετῆς].[74]

Sedek righteousness; then, moving on to the name of the city he says, king of peace, Salem after all meaning peace." *In Genesim* 35, *PG* 53.328. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:315.

69. Heb. 7:5; Gen. 14:20. Chrysostom was not afraid to offer a measure of typology and describes Melchizedek as "a type of Christ" [τύπος ἔμελλεν εἶναι τοῦ Χριστοῦ]. *In Genesim* 35, *PG* 53.328.

70. *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.922. Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, 193.

71. *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.923. Ibid., 196.

72. Ibid. There is no doubt with regard to Chrysostom's position that the Aaronic priesthood was inferior to that of Melchizedek and by relationship that of the Christians. Earlier in the same discourse he comments "that the old priesthood has ceased to exist and another, a new priesthood has been brought in to take its place." *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.922. Ibid., 194.

73. *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.924. Ibid., 198.

74. *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.925. Ibid.

Chrysostom viewed the Aaronic priesthood with its animal sacrifices as a carnal system and the Christian system that replaced it as something higher and more spiritual, owing to the by-now familiar notion of bloodless sacrifice. Throughout his homilies, Chrysostom offered a dim view of the Old Testament animal sacrifices.[75] Indeed, according to John, God never desired animal sacrifices but commanded that they take place only as an accommodation until he could one day wean the Israelites off of the practice as a physician attempts to heal a sick patient. As John conceived of the origins of the practice, the patriarchal-era Jews rather than God desired animal sacrifices. Therefore, he says, "God yielded and permitted sacrifices [as if to say] 'You are all eager and avid for sacrifices. If sacrifice you must, then sacrifice to me.'"[76] God, however, never intended such an accommodation to last. Chrysostom argued that since Melchizedek "is surely much more venerable than Abraham," then it naturally followed "that we must also admit from every angle that one priesthood is being brought in to replace another and that it is much more sublime than the old priesthood.[77] Thus the Christian priesthood, with its "service of God through the virtue of the soul" [τῆς κατὰ ψυχὴν ἀρετῆς τὸν Θεὸν θεραπεύειν], replaced "that of the Jewish priesthood" [τῆς ἱερωσύνης τῆς Ἰουδαϊκῆς] with its "sacrifice of sheep and calves."[78]

For Chrysostom, it was not a contradiction to say that Abraham was both a model of classical virtue with a virtuous soul and the personification of the Old Testament "carnal" priesthood. Chrysostom made clear to his flock that his extolling of the superiority of the Christ-like priesthood of Melchizedek did not impugn Abraham's virtuous character in any way. It is not that Abraham was deficient in his priesthood, but rather that his priesthood was simply a shadow compared to that of Melchizedek, which was a precursor to the priesthood of Christ. In his commentary on Job, Chrysostom notes that Job, like Abraham, Noah, and Abel, should not be blamed for offering sacrifices that were not even in accordance with the Mosaic Law.[79] John's basic argument was that the Israelite heroes of the Old Testament could not be held accountable for that which had not yet been revealed. Indeed, Abraham, like Job, Noah, Abel, and

75. Stephen D. Benin, "Sacrifice as Education in Augustine and Chrysostom," *Church History* 52, no. 1 (1983): 17ff.

76. *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.880. Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, 90.

77. *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.925. Ibid., 199.

78. Ibid.

79. *Commentarius in Job*, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 35.10. John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentaries on the Sages: Commentary on Proverbs and Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), 22.

all of the other exemplars of Israel, were participating in the divine economy and so should be excused if their priestly offerings did not match that which followed. John's contemporaneous Jewish community, however, had no such excuse.

Chrysostom's presentation of Melchizedek as superior to Abraham sent a clear message to his flock. Although Abraham was "the forefather both of [the Christian] polity and also of the Jewish," Melchizedek was "of another race," which demonstrated that "the uncircumcised person is far superior" [καὶ δείκνυσι τὸν ἀκρόβυστον πολλῷ βελτίονα].[80] The Genesis encounter of Abraham and Melchizedek provided Chrysostom with valuable ammunition in his competition with the Jewish community of Antioch, whether real or perceived, for the hearts and minds of his congregation. The language John uses is explicit. He declares that "the Jewish [worship] has been cast out" [περιγεγονότως ἔῤῥιψεν ἔξω τὰ Ἰουδαϊκά][81] and replaced with a superior model. John and his flock represented that superior system in his homilies.

Chrysostom's language, with regard to Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek, underscores his perception that some members of his flock were excessively enamored with Judaism. Chrysostom's reference to the Pauline corpus, to which he believed the Epistle to the Hebrews belonged, provided him with an opportunity to promote Christianity and diminish Judaism at the same time. As is the case with much of his commentary on Paul's works, Chrysostom amplifies Paul's language and resolves any potential ambiguities of the scriptural text. Thus John declares the "abolition" of the Jewish priesthood and worship and the "superiority" of their Christian equivalents.

Abraham, as the father of both Gentiles and Jews (at least in Chrysostom's Christian context) presented a dilemma for the Antiochene exegete. Since Chrysostom constantly extolled the great patriarch in countless sermons, it was only natural for members of his flock to question the position of his biological descendants in the history of salvation. John's argument that the Jewish sacrificial system was replaced by the worship of God through the virtue of the soul allowed him to refute Jewish claims and preserve the image he had crafted of Abraham at the same time. For Chrysostom, it was inconsequential that Abraham was the father of the Levitical priesthood since the patriarch's true priesthood and sacrifice were undeniably present in his virtuous life.

The transformation of the priesthood described in Hebrews was the context within which Chrysostom articulated the transformation of Second Temple Judaism into Christianity. For Chrysostom, if "the priesthood was

80. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 12, *PG* 63.98 (*NPNF1* 14.424).

81. Ibid.

changed, therefore also the Covenant is. And it was changed not only in its character, or in its ordinances, but also in its tribe. For of necessity [it must be changed] in its tribe also."[82] John was aware of the temptation to view such a transformation as a repudiation of the Old Covenant (and Abraham as well) and states that "here the Heretics press on."[83] The Old Covenant was neither "evil" nor "vicious" but was "weak through the flesh."

Abraham thus served as an exegetical bridge for Chrysostom between the Old and the New in which he could extol the virtue and holiness of the patriarch while at the same time point toward something greater. John portrayed Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek in such a way that his flock could see that the patriarch himself understood the greater nature of that which was to come by virtue of his submission to the priest-king. This submission was indicative of the transformation of the Old (embodied in Abraham) to the New (in the person of Melchizedek). Chrysostom states that the encounter between Old and New was arranged by God "with the Eucharist in mind, because [Melchizedek] too offered bread and wine to Abraham."[84]

As I already mentioned, Abraham's true priesthood was embodied by his virtuous life. Although Chrysostom portrays Abraham as a layman to the priestly Melchizedek, in Chrysostom's homilies he is still, nevertheless, the father of the Old Testament priesthood. Once again, Chrysostom adapted the qualities of Abraham to suit the particular objectives of his sermon. These consisted of a multifaceted argument aimed at appropriating Abraham in word, deed, and spiritual essence as a Christian patriarch. Abraham proved himself to be a priest in his intent to carry out the sacrifice of his son and subsequent sacrifice of the ram. Through "his own will" to carry out the sacrifice of Isaac, Chrysostom states that Abraham was thus "ordained a priest, by the blood of his only-begotten, by the sacrifice of a lamb; for the priests also were consecrated by the blood of the victims which were offered to God."[85] In performing these sacrificial and "virtuous actions," Abraham became "a priest from his own feelings" [ἱερέα ἐξ οἰκείων σπλάγχνων γενόμενον].[86]

82. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 13, *PG* 63.101 (*NPNF1* 14.428). Here John echoes the words of Heb. 7:12–13. In Chapter 5 I will examine in more detail Chrysostom's use of Abraham to articulate his understanding of the Old Covenant and its relationship to the Christian New Covenant.

83. Ibid. Chrysostom is referring to Marcion and those sympathetic with his rejection of the Old Testament.

84. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 110, *PG* 55.276. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:27.

85. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 3, *PG* 61.417 (*NPNF1* 12.292).

86. *Vidi dominum* 6, *SC* 277.4.2. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, 2:84.

David Rylaarsdam notes that Chrysostom viewed the priesthood within the Greek philosophical tradition that saw the priest engaged in angelic, heavenly activities in which "the priest plays an important role in leading people to the heavenly way of life taught and made possible by Christ."[87] Within the context of this philosophical tradition, Chrysostom associated priestly activities with the language of a winged ascent from earth to heaven.[88] Abraham demonstrates such priestly qualities in that "his yearning for God gave him wings, and he did not stop his flight with visible things, nor did he devote himself only to the seed which was promised to him, but fixed his thoughts on what was to come."[89] Thus Chrysostom describes Abraham as the patriarch who by virtue of his attempted sacrifice of Isaac becomes a priest [γέγονεν ἱερεὺς], transcends nature, and travels toward heaven [καὶ πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν μεθορμισάμενος].[90]

Abraham, in Chrysostom's works, is not only one of the fathers of the Old Testament priesthood but a model that other figures of scripture imitated. Such imitation was not only the domain of men. Hannah, for example, showed that "she was, in fact, a priestess in her very being, imitating the patriarch Abraham and rivaling him for preeminence: whereas he took his son and descended, she let hers stay permanently in the temple."[91] Hannah's gender did not prohibit her from imitating the patriarch, and in this way both Abraham and Hannah served as priestly models for the women in Chrysostom's flock. "Do you see the woman rivaling the man? Do you see there was no obstacle on the part of nature to her emulating the patriarch?"[92] In Chrysostom's discussion of the priesthood and Abraham, the emulation of Abraham is once again shown as something performed by scriptural figures who themselves act as models for Chrysostom's congregation. Although, in Chrysostom's homilies, Melchizedek is clearly the superior priest, there are still spiritual and virtuous aspects of Abraham's priesthood that the faithful should imitate as did Hannah.

Despite Abraham's association with the Old Testament priesthood, Chrysostom nevertheless had ample material with which to educate his flock

87. David Rylaarsdam, "On Earth as If in Heaven: John Chrysostom on Christ, Priests, and the Making of Angels," *Studia Patristica* 47 (2010): 238.

88. Rylaarsdam observes that such language was common among the early church fathers. See Gregory Nazianzus, *Orationes* 2.22 (*SC* 247.118).

89. *Catecheses ad illuminandos* 8, *SC* 50.8.7. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Walter Burghardt, trans. Paul W. Harkins, vol. 31, Ancient Christian Writers (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1963), 123.

90. *Messis quidem multa*, *PG* 63.517.

91. *De Anna* 3, *PG* 54.656. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, 2:102.

92. Ibid.

concerning his holistic view of the Christian priesthood that affected not just ordained clergy but all of the faithful. Chrysostom possessed a view of the priesthood that encompassed both the clergy and the laity. As George Dragas observes, Chrysostom presented the Christian priesthood as comprised of two components: the "special priesthood," which is that of the ordained clergy, and the "general priesthood," which is that of all believers.[93] Dragas describes this distinction as one in which "the ordained priests offer the vertical dimension of the Eucharist and the lay priests offer the horizontal Eucharist, what has been called 'the Eucharist after the Eucharist.'"[94] Whereas the special priesthood of ordained priests presided over the Eucharistic sacrifice, the general priesthood of all believers offered the sacrifice alluded to by Hosea: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."[95]

For Chrysostom, Abraham was a model of the general priesthood whom his flock should emulate. Chrysostom described such a lay priesthood when he said, "For to have contempt for money makes men approved . . . and constitutes them priests, yea of a priesthood that brings great reward. For the merciful man is not arrayed in a vestment reaching to the feet, nor does he carry about bells, nor wear a crown; but he is wrapped in the robe of loving-kindness, one holier than the sacred vestment; and is anointed with oil, not composed of material elements, but produced by the Spirit, and he bears a crown of mercies."[96] If Chrysostom did not see Abraham as a model of the special priesthood, he most certainly viewed him as emblematic of the Christian general priesthood. In the same homily on Second Corinthians, Chrysostom tells his flock, "When then you see a poor believer, think that you behold an altar" [Ὅταν οὖν ἴδῃς πένητα πιστὸν, θυσιαστήριον ὁρᾷν νόμιζε].[97] Abraham, as Chrysostom presented him, was well suited to this aspect of Christian priesthood. As George Dragas notes, Chrysostom considered the general priesthood with its sacrifice of mercy as a higher form of priesthood than that of the special priesthood since it is on the basis of the general priesthood "that both the [individual] Christian and the world are judged."[98] If Abraham was imperfect as a model of the Eucharist function of the priesthood, he certainly exhibited no deficiencies as a model for the laity in their priestly role.

93. Dragas, "The Social Message of St. John Chrysostom," 61.

94. Ibid.

95. Hosea 6:6.

96. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 20, *PG* 61.539 (*NPNF1* 12.374).

97. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 20, PG 61.540 (*NPNF1* 12.374). Lit., "place of sacrifice" [θυσιαστήριον].

98. Dragas, "The Social Message of St. John Chrysostom," 63.

In summary, Chrysostom's presentation of Abraham as a priest cast the patriarch in a different role. In the vast majority of Chrysostom's references to Abraham, his actions are consistently applauded as exemplary in every way and consistent with Christian norms. Abraham's intersection with a Christian typological figure in the person of Melchizedek, however, necessitated a more subservient portrayal of the patriarch. In many ways, Chrysostom was bound by the language of Hebrews and his literal mode of exegesis. Abraham, though not the exemplar in this vignette from the Genesis narrative, is still portrayed as one who is in full accord with John's (and the author of Hebrews') Christological assessment of the encounter between the patriarch Abraham and the priest-king Melchizedek.

Chrysostom, nevertheless, found an opportunity to extol Abraham's virtue as a priest, most especially within the context of the *akedah*. Although Abraham's priesthood was not a precursor to the Christian Eucharistic priesthood, it still warranted praise because of the association of the attempted sacrifice of Abraham's beloved son with the crucifixion of Christ. The events at Mount Moriah allowed Chrysostom to assign virtue to Abraham's non-Christian priesthood, but in a way that did not imply a connection to the Christian priesthood. Since, as Chrysostom argued, the old priesthood had been abolished, the only contemporary relevance to Abraham's priestly activity to that of the ordained Christian priesthood was in the *akedah*, which was typologically Christian in nature.

Nevertheless, Abraham possessed the qualities that were entirely consistent with Chrysostom's view of the general priesthood of all believers in that he was a preeminent model of mercy and loving-kindness. For Chrysostom, these types of priestly qualities were of greater importance, since "the end of the special priesthood is the activation of the general priesthood."[99] Chrysostom saw the end goal of the general priesthood as the lived Christian life, which was a life he presented Abraham as having lived.

4. Abraham as an Intertextual Figure

The definition of "intertextuality" as it pertains to the examination of scripture is fraught with difficulty, and demands nuance. The axiom that "scripture interprets scripture" perhaps lend itself well to a broad definition of scriptural intertextuality. Certainly, Chrysostom saw the Old and New Testaments as a composite work that was self-referential in nature. Beyond this basic definition of intertextuality, however, was a mode of exegesis that was not altogether

99. Ibid.

different from rabbinic interpretation. Daniel Boyarin describes such interpretation as one in which the interpreter (whether Jewish or Christian) "make sense of the Bible for themselves and their times and in themselves and in their times." In this way the scriptural text is "gapped and dialogical, and into the gaps the reader slips, interpreting and completing the text in accordance with the codes of his or her culture."[100] It is not an altogether unfair assessment to say that Chrysostom subscribed to such an intertextual approach to scriptural interpretation in general and with regard to the figure of Abraham in particular.

We have already seen that John Chrysostom viewed Abraham as a "bridge" between the Old Testament and the New with regard to his encounter with Melchizedek in which John saw the prefigurement of the future Christian priesthood. This particular association is part of a larger intertextual view of the patriarch, which is due in large measure to the influence of Pauline exegetical norms. As Michael Fishbane notes, the intertextual application of Abraham was intrinsic to the Old Testament in general and rabbinic exegesis in particular. Isaiah, for example, recalls the Abrahamic promise as a sign that the exilic period would one day come to an end.[101] As Boyarin argues, such intertextual usage of scripture by Jewish exegetes (or Christian exegetes for that matter) is to be expected, since "reality is always represented through texts that refer to other texts, through language that is a construction of the historical, ideological, and social systems of a people."[102]

Chrysostom emulated Paul (if not rabbinic exegetes) in his intertextual vision of Abraham. Indeed, John was well suited to such an intertextual interpretation since, as Elizabeth Clark rightly notes, "Chrysostom's interpretation . . . is hermeneutically accomplished not through allegory, but through intertextual exegesis, which he uses to constrain the Biblical text in a conservative direction."[103] For Chrysostom, Abraham was a useful compass with which to chart such a "conservative direction" of his exegesis in general and his view of the inner harmony and unity of the Old and New Testament texts in particular. Clark aptly summarizes Chrysostom's intertextual approach when she observes that "through such intertextual exegesis, Scripture could be affirmed as self-interpreting, as if the interpreter had played no role in the

100. Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 14.

101. Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 375.

102. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, 14.

103. Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 160.

production of the meaning, as if no conceptual cracks existed between the texts, and as if no political consequences attended the choice of the intertexts."[104]

Chrysostom had nothing but contempt for Marcionism, which he deemed a heresy. Indeed, his presentation of Abraham along with other figures of the Old Testament as exemplars for his flock to emulate hinged on a refutation of any teaching that rejected the story of ancient Israel and its leading figures. While Chrysostom saw the need to separate contemporaneous Jews from their sacred scripture, he also had to maintain the integrity of the Old Testament narrative. In Chrysostom's commentary on Psalm 47, the psalmist's reference to the "God of Abraham" is an indication that there is "one God of New and Old Testaments" [Εἶτα δεικνὺς αὐτὸν ὄντα Καινῆς καὶ Παλαιᾶς ἕνα Θεὸν].[105] One proof of his conclusion lies in the classic Christian interpretation of Jeremiah, in which God declares that "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah."[106] The reference to a "new covenant" is, for Chrysostom, an intertextual reference denoting that "there is one and the same lawgiver of New and Old" [δεικνὺς ὅτι καὶ Καινῆς καὶ Παλαιᾶς εἷς καὶ ὁ αὐτός ἐστι νομοθέτης].[107] Another proof Chrysostom offers is that if Christ is the God of the "living and the dead," then it follows that he is also the God of "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the men of that sort," and therefore one can see "that He is the God both of the Old and New [Testament]" [ὅτι Παλαιᾶς καὶ Καινῆς αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ Θεός].[108]

John, in keeping with Galatians, presents Hagar and Sarah and their respective sons as representatives of the two covenants offered by one God.[109] For John, this was an indication of how "close is the relationship of the Old Testament with the New" [τοσαύτη τῆς Παλαιᾶς πρὸς τὴν Καινὴν ἡ συμφωνία].[110] Paul's intertextual approach is John's, as the latter clarifies the former and states that "just as there were two wives, there are two Testaments" [Ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐκεῖ δύο γυναῖκες, οὕτως ἐνταῦθα δύο Διαθῆκαι], namely that the Old is the type of the New that was to come [δείκνυσι τὴν συγγένειαν τῆς Καινῆς πρὸς τὴν Παλαιὰν, ὅταν ἐκεῖνα τούτων ᾖ τύπος].[111] While "there are

104. Ibid., 161.

105. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 47, *PG* 55.215. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:308.

106. Jer. 31:31–32.

107. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 47, *PG* 55.215. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:308.

108. *In Joannem* 70, *PG* 59.382 (*NPNF1* 14.255).

109. Gal. 4:21–31.

110. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 7, PG 60.441 (*NPNF1* 11.376). Note that here Chrysostom uses the word συμφωνία or lit., "with one voice."

two Testaments [εἰσι δύο διαθῆκαι] . . . there is one lawgiver, just as there is one man, Abraham" [ἕνα ἔχουσι νομοθέτην, καθάπερ ἐκεῖναι ἕνα ἄνδρα τὸν Ἀβραάμ].[112]

Chrysostom explains that Abraham's relevance to his congregation is a result of the Spirit of faith [Πνεῦμα τῆς πίστεως] that imbued the patriarch and that was similarly accessible to the contemporary Christian believer. If Abraham believed the promise given to him in the Old Testament, despite all of the seeming contradictions and inconsistencies, then there was no reason for the Christians of his community to doubt God's promises to them that were contained within the pages of the New Testament as well as the Old. Such faith was possible since "the New and the Old come from the same Spirit, and the same Spirit which speaks in the former spoke also here, and that faith is the teacher of everyone, and without it we can say nothing."[113]

The "Spirit of faith" imbued all of the great figures of the Old Testament, and such faith was what Chrysostom believed "the disobedient Jews violently resisted" [ἀλλὰ τῶν ἀφηνιαζόντων Ἰουδαίων, σφοδροτέρου δεηθέντων χαλινοῦ]. Nevertheless, "at least in the Old Testament, there are many found who are not thus led away, such as Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Elias, Elisha, and all of the others, who emulated them in the New Testament philosophy" [ὅσοι τὴν ἐν τῇ Καινῇ φιλοσοφίαν ἐζήλωσαν].[114] John clearly defines an overarching philosophy that was embraced by all of the faithful Israelite and Christian generations. Just as it is inconceivable that a rabbinic exegete saw anything other than the flowering of Israel in the promise given to Abraham, it was equally inconceivable that John saw anything other than unanimity of thought and purpose throughout the Old and New Testaments.

For John, only someone who rejected the Spirit of faith could read the Old Testament without accepting the New. When John suggests the superiority of the New dispensation he maintains that it is "not to introduce conflict between Old and New—perish the thought . . . [but rather] to make the point that the Jew who disallows the inspired writings about Christ undermines the greater part of the inspired writings, nor could he clearly show the nobility of the Old Testament if he refused to admit the New" [καὶ οὐκ ἂν ἔχοι δεῖξαι σαφῶς τὴν εὐγένειαν τῆς Παλαιᾶς, εἰ μὴ τὴν Καινὴν παραδέξαιτο.][115] For

111. *Habentes eundem spiritum*, *PG* 51.285.

112. *Habentes eundem spiritum*, *PG* 51.286.

113. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 116, *PG* 55.321. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:90.

114. *Habentes eundem spiritum*, *PG* 51.286.

John Chrysostom, the Old Testament text was an entirely Christian text and Abraham an entirely Christian figure of that text.

The qualities of virtue demanded love, and moreover, grace [χρεία ἀγάπης, πολλῷ μᾶλλον ἔνθα ἡ χάρις] and the care of others. Such virtue was found not only in the pages of the New Testament but also in the actions of the great exemplars of the Old. John states that "Samuel was shown to be great" in this regard and "so was David, so Abraham, so Elijah, and so each one of the righteous, those in the New Testament and those in the Old."[116] While John often qualified his typological approach by observing that the age in which Old Testament figures such as Abraham lived was in many ways different from that of the fourth century, virtue was still virtue irrespective of the time period. Thus Chrysostom asks his flock, "And whence did Abraham obtain a good report? Was it not from love in doing what he did concerning his nephew? What he did as to his supplication for the Sodomites? For strongly, strongly, were the Saints affected with love and with sympathy."[117] The virtue the Old Testament saints exhibited was identical to that which the New Testament saints exhibited, and John, like the author of Hebrews (whom he believes to be Paul) "is not ashamed to call them brethren,"[118] for "there are many lauded in the New Testament and there are many praised in the Old Testament" [πολλὰ αὐτῶν τὰ ἐγκώμια ἐν τῇ Καινῇ, πολλοὶ αὐτῶν οἱ ἔπαινοι ἐν τῇ Παλαιᾷ].[119]

John's desire to present a uniform model of virtue throughout the Old and New Testament scriptural texts was not only a feature of his intertextual exegetical style but also a pastoral consideration given the religious competition that was part of fourth-century Antiochene society. The profound influence of Greek religion and philosophical thought spurred him to defend the value of the Old Testament and its figures such as Abraham against disparagement from defenders of the old Roman religion. John instructed his flock how to respond "in debate with the Greeks that the Old Testament is especially deserving of faith."[120] The Old Testament was a stumbling block for many in the fourth century, such as Augustine, who, although enamored with the New Testament message had great difficulties with the Old Testament narrative. The members

115. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 110, *PG* 55.267. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:15.

116. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 15, *PG* 61.506 (*NPNF1* 12.352).

117. *In epistulam i ad Thessalonicenses* 4, *PG* 62.421 (*NPNF1* 13.342).

118. Heb. 2:11.

119. *Peccata fratrum non evulganda*, *PG* 51.359.

120. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 110, *PG* 55.266. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:14.

of John's community were no different in this regard, and the keen interest he shows in defining and defending the boundaries of his community against both Greek philosophical and Jewish religious thought is an indication of his concern.

John's intertextual approach to exegesis, in general, and his presentation of Abraham in particular, afforded him with ways to link the two narratives together by noting various similarities in the situations and events of each text. John makes such a correlation when he explains that as "Peter was first called Simon and the sons of Zebedee, James and John were called 'Sons of Thunder' [so] we also find in the Old Testament that Abraham was first called Abram and afterwards Abraham, and Jacob was changed into Israel, and Sarah was Sarai."[121] John also notes that Peter, like Abraham and Jacob, has his name changed while he was in the middle of his life.[122] John makes a similar correlation when he notes that as "Abraham was not dishonored because he had an impious father" [ὅτι πατέρα ἀσεβῆ ἔσχεν ὁ Ἀβραάμ], so too was Timothy not dishonored even though he also had an impious father.[123]

John Chrysostom's homiletical presentation of Abraham demonstrates his use of intertextual exegesis. Abraham was of preeminent value in this regard, both because of the intertextual associations present in the Pauline corpus (and which Chrysostom frequently referenced) and because of the virtuous features of the patriarch (which Chrysostom wished to convey to his congregation). John makes clear his belief that the Old and New Testaments constitute one text and that Abraham, the father of many nations, was a preeminent figure to convey this message. Thus, for Chrysostom, there is no inconsistency in declaring Abraham to be the forefather of both Christians and Jews.[124] For John, Abraham as an intertextual figure had a universal application in that the "God of Abraham" means not simply the God of the Jews or "the God of the Gentiles but of the world" [Ὁ Θεὸς, οὐχ ὁ τῶν ἐθνῶν, ἀλλ' ὁ τῆς οἰκουμένης].[125] In this way, Chrysostom resorted to an intertextual exegesis of Abraham to illustrate, not only the unity of the Old and New Testament scriptural texts but also the divine economy as defined in the Gospels and the eschatological and universal claims of the Christian church.

121. *De mutatione nominum (homiliae 1–4)*, *PG* 51.126.

122. *De mutatione nominum (homiliae 1–4)*, *PG* 51.128.

123. *In Genesim (sermone 9)*, *PG* 54.627.

124. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 12, *PG* 63.98.

125. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 24, *PG* 63.169 (*NPNF1* 63.169).

5. Conclusion

John Chrysostom's opinion of the theological significance of Abraham was deeply rooted in his pastoral understanding of the patriarch. Amanda Berry Wiley notes, with regard to Chrysostom's historical outlook, that "the most central aspect of history for John seems to be its utility."[126] We can say the same about his theological outlook. That Chrysostom viewed theology as an applied science was a function of the latter fourth century in which he lived. As George Dragas aptly puts it, "Chrysostom appeared at a time in history when the battle between the Christian church and secular world was shifting from dogmatics to ethics as the Church continued to struggle against secularization."[127] Chrysostom's treatment of Abraham illustrates the nature of this transition as he focuses his soteriological vision on the life and actions of the Old Testament patriarch.

Chrysostom's exhortations to his congregation to emulate Abraham's virtue was not simply a call to imitate virtue for virtue's sake but was part of a larger soteriological message that firmly established the rewards his flock would obtain if they followed his instruction and the patriarch's example. Chrysostom used his homiletic encomium to Abraham as a way to describe his view of Christian salvation. The culmination of Abraham's philanthropic life was a foretaste of the eschaton, in which the patriarch encountered the person of Christ in the form of one of the three angelic visitors at Mamre. Chrysostom argued that such an encounter with Christ was possible for the members of his congregation if they imitated the patriarch's virtue. Put another way, Chrysostom believed in the imminence of the eschaton. Those who lived a virtuous life and cared for the least of Christ's brethren had the potential to meet their savior in person, and those who failed to do so already found themselves in hell.

Chrysostom's understanding of Abraham's place in the overarching Christian narrative also had a profound influence on his theological application of such a prominent Old Testament figure. At one level this placement was typological and saw the prefigurement of Christological events such as the crucifixion in the attempted sacrifice of Isaac. In another sense, Abraham was both a father of Christians and a representative of the Old that had given way to the New. In this way, the priesthood of Abraham and that of his Levite descendants was inferior to that of the Christians, which was represented by the priest-king Melchizedek to whom Abraham himself submitted.

126. Wylie, "The Exegesis of History in John Chrysostom's Homilies on Acts," 67.

127. Dragas, "Perceptions of John Chrysostom in Contemporary Greek Orthodoxy," 381.

In spite of Chrysostom's belief in the superiority of the New Testament, he nevertheless defended the value of the Old Testament and its principal figures against Christians and non-Christians who challenged its worthiness or its relevance and applicability as a Christian scriptural text. John, like the Apostle Paul before him, viewed Abraham as a bridge between the Jewish and Christian narratives. Indeed, Chrysostom used Abraham as he did other figures of the Old Testament to demonstrate to his flock that the sacred text of the Jews belonged to them and was part of the Christian metanarrative. As Wylie observes, "[T]he Old Testament had a strong historical significance for John,"[128] and John used Abraham to communicate to his flock how the history of Israel was in fact the history of the Christian people. In John's intertextual examination of Abraham, however, the patriarch was relevant not simply to Jews or Christians but rather to all people. John's claim that the "God of Abraham" was the "God of the world" was perhaps a prescient if unwitting foretelling of the advent of a third faith to claim Abrahamic roots in the seventh century.

128. Wylie, "The Exegesis of History in John Chrysostom's Homilies on Acts," 60.

5

Abraham in Chrysostom's View of Jews and Judaism

1. Introduction

Chrysostom was neither the first nor certainly the last Christian exegete to use Abraham in shaping his view of Jews and Judaism.[1] Notwithstanding the pastoral and theological importance that Chrysostom attributed to key scriptural events such as the hospitality and the *akedah*, for him the relationship of Christians to the Abrahamic covenant and its role in salvation history was particularly useful in his effort to locate the contemporaneous Christian and Jewish communities within that very history. Put another way, Chrysostom sought not only to define the ways in which Christians were the rightful children of Abraham but also the ways in which Jews were not.

Chrysostom places his discussion of Jews and Judaism within the context of his understanding that Jews were estranged from their Abrahamic lineage because of their failure to accept Christianity as the fulfillment of the promise God made to the patriarch. In order to communicate this understanding of Christians as the true children of Abraham, within his homilies John engaged in hypothetical debates with imaginary Jewish interlocutors who challenge him and whom he then refutes. These debates, while purely rhetorical in nature, nevertheless express some of the major points of contention that existed

1. Athanasius of Alexandria, as one example, references Abraham in his treatise *On the Incarnation* to demonstrate what he sees is the error of "the Jews [who] are trifling, and the time in question, which they refer to the future, is actually come. . . . For if, I say,—which is just what we actually see,—there is no longer king nor prophet nor Jerusalem nor sacrifice nor vision among them, but even the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of God, and Gentiles, leaving their godlessness, are now taking refuge with the God of Abraham [λοιπὸν πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν Ἀβραὰμ καταφεύγουσι], through the Word, even our Lord Jesus Christ, then it must be plain, even to those who are exceedingly obstinate, that the Christ is come, and that He has illumined absolutely all with His light, and given them the true and divine teaching concerning His Father." *De Incarnatione*, *PG* 25b:168 (*NPNF2* 4.57–58).

between Christians and Jews. Paul alludes to such contention between Christians and Jews over the relationship of Abraham to the Jewish people, particularly in his letter to the Romans.[2] Paul's commentary on the subject had a profound influence on Chrysostom's view of Judaism in general and the place of Jews in the Abrahamic covenant in particular.

Due to the lack of contemporaneous Jewish texts, the scholar of today will have trouble ascertaining the nature of the Jewish reaction to Christian claims to Abrahamic lineage.[3] On the Christian side, however, the claims to Abraham that originated with Paul and continued through church fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa[4] and Ambrose of Milan[5] demonstrate that Christians felt there was a sense of competition with Jews regarding ownership of the patriarch's legacy. One can assert that Chrysostom was convinced the competing claims to Abrahamic lineage were of such magnitude, that he allocated a significant amount of homiletical time and space to refuting what he perceived as the claims of Jews and to supporting those of his church.

Among contemporary scholars, Robert Wilken has contributed a great deal toward our understanding of early patristic attitudes toward Jews in general and that of John Chrysostom in particular.[6] Wilken describes how members of Chrysostom's flock were enamored with Judaism and Jewish practices. In many ways, Chrysostom's treatment of Abraham transcends the preacher's objection to the practice of "Judaizing Christians" to worship in both the church and synagogue and is part of a broader theological discussion in which Chrysostom seeks to convince his community that they were the rightful inheritors of the Abrahamic covenant and were thus the true Israel.

Chrysostom's presentation of Abraham is part of a general view of Judaism in which Gentiles who emerged out of the darkness of idolatry took possession

2. Romans 4.

3. The Jew Trypho, from Justin Martyr's *Dialogue* that bears his name, while very likely a construct of the Christian author, nevertheless provides us with hints as to some Jewish concerns regarding Christian practices when Trypho tells Justin "you [Christians], professing to be pious, and supposing yourselves better than others, are not in any particular way separated from them, and do not alter your mode of living from the nations, in that you observe no festivals or sabbaths, and do not have the rite of circumcision; and further, resting your hopes on a man that was crucified, you yet expect to obtain some good thing from God, while you do not obey His commandments." *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 10.3 (*ANF* 1.199).

4. *In baptismum Christi oratio*, *PG* 46.588.

5. *De Abraham*, *PL* 14.434.

6. Along with the previously mentioned *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, see also Robert L. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

of the Abrahamic inheritance that Jews abandoned when they rejected Christ. Chrysostom describes this transition when he says, "We, who were nurtured by darkness, drew the light to ourselves and were freed from the gloom of their error. They were the branches of that holy root, but those branches were broken."[7] Chrysostom's allusion to Romans 11 presents the Gentile church as grafted into the tree of Israel even though the Gentiles "had no share in the root."[8] In Chrysostom's presentation of Abraham, as well as in his wider view of the relationship of Christianity to Judaism, Gentiles, by which he meant Christians, are not simply a replacement for unfaithful Jews but fulfill the Abrahamic promise.[9] Christ's fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise meant that the old worship and practices of Judaism had outlived their usefulness. While Judaism had a role to play before Christ, it had long since ceased to function.[10] Chrysostom thus saw the competition between church and synagogue as one "between the earthly Jerusalem of the Old Covenant and the Jerusalem above of the New."[11]

To reinforce the point that Jews were unworthy and had been supplanted by Christians in their status as the true children of Abraham, Chrysostom amplified the language of the Pauline references to Abraham with his characteristic rhetorical flourishes and couched them as a hypothetical debate. Within the context of this debate, Chrysostom addressed the assertion of the Jews presented in the New Testament text who challenged Christ with the claim that they were the inheritors of the Abrahamic promise and that "Abraham is our father."[12] Chrysostom took seriously Jews' genuine claim to exclusive Abrahamic lineage and endeavored to show that the advent of Christ ended any relationship to the patriarch that the Jews may have possessed.

7. *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.845. John Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, trans. Paul W. Harkins, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1979), 5.

8. Ibid.

9. J. L. Malkowski remarks that, "Chrysostom makes it quite clear, Christ did not destroy the law because it prepared the way for him and led up to him. Christ fulfilled it." J. L. Malkowski, "The Element of Akairos in John Chrysostom's Anti-Jewish Polemic," *Studia Patristica* 12 (1975): 227.

10. Jean-Claude Margolin notes Chrysostom's opinion that the "[Jewish] religion which was fully and theologically justified before the birth of Christ, no longer had a function since the Incarnation and the Trinity replaced the old order." "Ainsi, leur religion qui était pleinement et théologiquement justifiée avant la naissance du Christ, n'a plus aucune raison d'être dès lors que l'Incarnation et la Trinité ont remplacé l'ancien ordre." Jean-Claude Margolin, "Brèves réflexions sur l'antijudaïsme de Jean Chrysostome et sur celui d'Érasme d'après les homélies Adversus Judaeos," in *Pères de l'Église au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1993), 40.

11. Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, 16.

12. John 8:39.

The sophistic method that Chrysostom utilized called for the use of diatribe when an orator confronted an opponent and his opposing viewpoint. Indeed, Chrysostom's exegetical hero Paul also engaged in a similar form of diatribe.[13] It is, therefore, hardly remarkable that John, prone as he was to sophistic methods, also applied them when discussing Abraham's relationship to Jews and Christians. While the invective used by Chrysostom in his assessment of the relationship of Jews and Judaism to Abraham is at times harsh, it does not rise to the level of that which Chrysostom used in his *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*. In his discussions of Abraham, Chrysostom makes use of a dialogical form of diatribe in which he argues against a homiletical construct of a Jewish antagonist. If virtue was the key marker of Abrahamic lineage, then Chrysostom endeavored to paint a picture of Jews so lacking in virtue that his audience could not help but concede his point that there was no way Jews could possibly be associated with the patriarch.

2. Abrahamic Lineage

John Chrysostom was keenly aware that it was difficult for Christians to lay claim to an Abrahamic lineage. For Chrysostom, there was little difference between the scriptural Jews of the New Testament who "found in the patriarch grounds for self-importance and endeavored to establish their kinship with him [εἰς τὴν τούτου συγγένειαν ἑαυτοὺς εἰσωθεῖν] in the words, 'We are children of Abraham,'"[14] and the contemporaneous Jewish community whom he believed held a similar position. The focus of Chrysostom's argument against this claim was to demonstrate that "on the basis of their evil ways [Jews] are in fact unworthy of such kinship."[15] Chrysostom, therefore, believed that Jews had forfeited their relationship to Abraham since they were "negligent about virtue in their own souls."[16]

Chrysostom did not deny that Abraham was the father of the Jewish people. In his commentary on Hebrews, Chrysostom acknowledges that Abraham is the father of both Christians and Jews.[17] He did, however, question

13. For the most prominent and classic treatment of Paul's use of diatribe see Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910).

14. John 8:33–59. *In Genesim* 31, *PG* 53.288. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 3 vols., Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 2:246.

15. Ibid.

16. *In Matthaeum* 3, *PG* 57.34 (*NPNF1* 10.16).

17. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 12, *PG* 63.98.

the state of that relationship in light of the scriptural and contemporaneous Jewish rejection of the gospel. Since Chrysostom understood that Abraham was completely integrated into the Christian narrative, he therefore considered Jews who did not accept Christ "to be alien from Abraham and from God" [ἀλλοτρίους ὄντας τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ].[18] Chrysostom argues that it was Christ who "had cast them out of their relationship to Abraham" [ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν τῆς συγγενείας αὐτοὺς ἐξέβαλε τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ],[19] "separated them off from the affinity to Abraham" [τῆς συγγενείας αὐτοὺς ἀφιστὰς τῆς τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ],[20] "shown them to have fallen from being Abraham's kinsmen" [δεικνὺς τῆς τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ συγγενείας ἐκπεπτωκότας],[21] and who "had shown them unworthy of Abraham" [ἀναξίους αὐτοὺς ἔδειξε τοῦ Ἀβραάμ].[22]

Christ removed the Jews from a "genuine relationship" [συγγενείας γνησίας] with Abraham in order to "pave the Gentiles' way to kinship [ἀγχιστείαν] with him."[23] In this particular reference, the word "ἀγχιστεία," which Chrysostom uses to describe the Gentiles' "kinship" with Abraham, is much stronger than the more common "συγγένεια." Whereas the latter simply implies "relationship," the former denotes a legally binding right of inheritance. In Chrysostom's presentation of Abraham, which drew heavily on Paul, the Christians were thus the legal next of kin with the full rights of inheritance.

As we have seen throughout Chrysostom's treatment of the patriarch, virtue was the criterion that defined Abrahamic lineage. Chrysostom defends his position with an example from the Old Testament when he asks, "For what were the sons of Samuel advantaged, tell me, by their father's nobleness, when they were not heirs of their father's virtue?"[24] Chrysostom argues that it was the failure of the Jewish people to adhere to universal categories of virtue, which the great Israelite saints possessed, that had cut them off from Abraham. Although the Jewish people "were sprung from those holy men . . . they were neglecting the virtue of the soul" and it was this virtue that was the governing criterion for relationship with Abraham. Chrysostom saw this criterion established in scripture, "for Scripture often speaks of the laws of relationship, not meaning

18. *In Joannem* 54, *PG* 59.300 (*NPNF1* 14.194). John 8:39ff. figures prominently in Chrysostom's exegesis of the state of the relationship of Jews to Abraham.

19. *In Joannem* 54, *PG* 59.299 (*NPNF1* 14.193). See also *In Matthaeum* 42, *PG* 57.452, ". . . τῆς μὲν πρὸς τὸν Ἀβραὰμ ἐξέβαλεν αὐτοὺς συγγενείας."

20. *In Matthaeum* 74, *PG* 58.680 (*NPNF1* 10.428).

21. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 19, *PG* 60.588 (*NPNF1* 11.490).

22. *In Joannem* 54, *PG* 59.300 (*NPNF1* 14.194).

23. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 8, *PG* 60.454 (*NPNF1* 11.385).

24. *In Matthaeum* 9, *PG* 57.181 (*NPNF1* 10.59).

the relationship of nature, but that of virtue and wickedness; Scripture calls a man son and brother of the one whose character he shares."[25]

Chrysostom softens his language somewhat and states that the blood relations of Abraham are not cut off entirely, provided, of course, that they "repent" and accept Christ. Chrysostom comments on the scriptural reference which states that "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham"[26] and suggests that this verse does not refer exclusively to Gentiles but also has "another meaning."[27] The other meaning to which Chrysostom refers is found in Isaiah where the prophet tells Israel to "Look to the rock from which you were hewn. . . . Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you."[28] The stones, therefore, to which Christ refers, represent not only Gentiles but also Jews. The qualification, however, is that Jews are not to seek "refuge in their forefathers" but rather "rest the hope of their salvation in their own repentance and continence" [μετανοίᾳ καὶ σωφροσύνῃ].[29] Chrysostom, drawing upon his literal, Antiochene mode of exegesis, comments on the next scriptural verse in Matthew, which states that "the axe is laid to the root of the trees,"[30] and observes that the text says the axe was "laid to the root," not that it actually cut or severed the root. Chrysostom states that the intent of this distinction was to induce fear and thus prompt repentance in the Jewish people. Christ, therefore, was "not depriving [Jews] of their kindred according to the flesh, but teaching them to seek after that affinity which is greater than it, and more real."[31] For Chrysostom there was no relationship to Abraham except that which was derived through emulation of the patriarch's virtue.

For Chrysostom it was not incongruous to say that Christ cast the Jewish people out of relationship with Abraham and to also suggest that they were not cut off entirely (at least initially). Chrysostom places the responsibility on the shoulders of the Jewish community for their failure to accept Christ. While John acknowledges that there was no one "more nearly connected [to Abraham] than the Jews," he nevertheless concludes that "by unbelief they were made aliens" [ἀλλ' ὅμως διὰ τὴν ἀπιστίαν ἠλλοτριώθησαν].[32] Christ, according to John,

25. *De Lazaro* 2, *PG* 48.983. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 41.

26. Matt. 3:9.

27. *In Matthaeum* 11, *PG* 57.194 (*NPNF1* 10.66).

28. Isaiah 51:1–2.

29. *In Matthaeum* 11, *PG* 57.194 (*NPNF1* 10.66). Here Chrysostom makes reference to the cardinal virtue "σωφροσύνῃ" and thus relates the practice of virtue to relationship with Abraham.

30. Matt. 3:10.

31. *In Matthaeum* 44, *PG* 57.466 (*NPNF1* 10.273).

32. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 19, *PG* 60.539 (*NPNF1* 11.494).

gave the Jewish people the benefit of the doubt and thus expelled them from their relationship to Abraham "gently and by little" [ἠρέμα καὶ κατὰ μικρὸν ἐκβάλλει τῆς συγγενείας αὐτοὺς ἐκείνης].[33] Thus, according to Chrysostom, when Christ expels the Jewish people from their relationship with Abraham he does so "to draw off their attention from this relationship . . . [and] . . . to persuade them no longer to rest their hopes of salvation in Abraham."[34]

Chrysostom, as always, had a pastoral point to make about the fractured state of the Jewish relationship to Abraham. Christians, themselves, were not to feel overly comfortable about the prospects of their salvation simply because they were baptized into the same faith as that of the early Christian martyrs. Such confidence in their Christian forefathers, Chrysostom suggested, could cause the members of his flock to fall into the same trap as the Jews who saw their salvation in terms of their relationship to Abraham. Chrysostom calls his congregation to pursue a virtuous life and says, "we must have our hope of salvation in our own righteous deeds, without counting up our fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers, or our relatives and friends, family and neighbors; for 'a brother does not redeem, shall a man redeem?'"[35]

3. Covenant and Law

Chrysostom, like the Apostle Paul, associated relationship to Abraham with the concepts of covenant and the law. Chrysostom also argues that Jews did the same thing, since Jews "made much of their descent from Abraham, and feared lest, abandoning the law, they should be considered strangers to his kin."[36] Chrysostom's response to the Jewish protestations with regard to their Abrahamic lineage is not simply that the new covenant replaces the old but that the Abrahamic covenant is greater than the Sinai covenant. Since the promise had been given to Abraham that his blessing would fall on the Gentiles and that promise was made 430 years before the law was given on Mount Sinai, then it was unreasonable to believe that the law of Sinai bestowed the blessings of life and righteousness that were destined to come from the Abrahamic covenant. John reasons that, "if the law bestows the blessings even life and righteousness, that promise is annulled" [Εἰ τοίνυν ὁ νόμος χαρίζεται τὰς εὐλογίας, καὶ τὴν ζωὴν καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἐκείνη ἄκυρός ἐστιν].[37] It was not,

33. *In Joannem* 54, *PG* 59.298 (*NPNF1* 14.192).

34. *In Joannem* 54, *PG* 59.299 (*NPNF1* 14.193).

35. *De Lazaro* 4, *PG* 48.1007. Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, 80. Here Chrysostom refers to Psalm 49:8.

36. *In epistulam ad Galatas commentaries* 3, *PG* 61.654 (*NPNF1* 13.28).

37. Ibid.

therefore, Christians who opposed the law of Sinai but Jews who, when they rejected Christ, implied that the Abrahamic promise was annulled.

Chrysostom's entire argument, of course, was based on the presupposition that the advent of Christ represented the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that he was to be the father of many nations. Certainly the ascendancy of the Christian church, particularly in the latter years of the fourth century in which John preached, did little to dissuade him from believing otherwise. John's logic, therefore, was that "God made a covenant with Abraham, promising that in his seed the blessing should come upon the heathen; and this blessing the law cannot turn aside."[38] The covenant at Sinai was simply an intermediary bridge between the Abrahamic covenant that preceded it and the new covenant that was to follow.

Chrysostom presents the Sinai covenant as an accommodation that God makes in order to help usher the Israelites toward the new covenant. According to Chrysostom, since the Jews had failed to emulate their father Abraham, the law was given as a type of consolation in order to expose their sins. In Chrysostom's view, the virtue displayed in Abraham's household was the forerunner of the Christian community. Thus he charts the history of the covenants in which "the church had been manifested in the times of Abraham, and then had been withdrawn in the midst of its course, the Jewish people came, and the legal polity, and then the new people appeared entire with their own laws."[39] The Abrahamic "church" of which Chrysostom speaks was an image of the perfected model that Christ instituted.

Chrysostom looked to Jeremiah's reference to a "new covenant" to frame his distinction between the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants and the precedence of the former over the latter. Chrysostom notes that Jeremiah specifically differentiates the new covenant from "the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt."[40] John notes that the prophet Jeremiah made specific reference to the covenant made during the Exodus event in order to distinguish it from the covenant made with Abraham. Thus John argues that Jeremiah spoke specifically about the Sinai covenant "lest thou should say [it was] the one made with Abraham" and thus somehow construe that the Sinai covenant replaced the overarching Abrahamic promise.[41]

38. Ibid.

39. *In Matthaeum* 3, *PG* 57.35 (*NPNF1* 10.17). "Τῆς γὰρ πολιτείας τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἐν τοῖς κατὰ τὸν Ἀβραὰμ χρόνοις φανείσης, εἶτα ἐν τῷ μέσῳ συσταλείσης, ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰουδαϊκὸς λαὸς καὶ ἡ νομικὴ πολιτεία, καὶ τότε ὁλόκληρος ὁ νέος ἐφάνη λαὸς μετὰ τῶν αὑτοῦ νόμων."

40. Jer. 31:32.

Chrysostom describes the Pauline association of Hagar and Ishmael with the old law and Sarah and Isaac with the new law as consistent with his model of prophecy made with words and prophecy made by example.[42] In terms of the two covenants, Chrysostom states that "Jeremiah foretold of these covenants through words, and Abraham revealed these covenants through works, by having two wives."[43] For Chrysostom, Abraham's example was eminently practical in almost every respect, and John eschews the opportunity to make even the most meager allegorical connection.

Since Chrysostom embraced the Old Testament as a Christian document and rejected any Marcionistic tendencies in the church, he felt it necessary to explain the function and the purpose of the law. John reasons that even though the Abrahamic promise was destined to supersede the law, the law was still necessary, since "[h]ad the law not been given, all would have been wrecked upon wickedness, and there would have been no Jews to listen to Christ; but now being given, it has effected two things; it has schooled its followers in a certain degree of virtue, and has pressed on them the knowledge of their own sins."[44] In this very Pauline model, John explains that "[t]he law . . . is not the adversary but the fellow-worker of grace."[45]

The law therefore had a function inasmuch as it helped advance and fulfill the Abrahamic covenant. Indeed, in Chrysostom's exegesis it was Christ who gave the law. As we already saw in Chapter Four, Chrysostom emphatically declared that there is "one God of New and Old Testaments" and this God, he states, is "the God also of our forefathers, the giver also of the law."[46] Since "Christ also gave the law," however, it follows that "what therefore it was His to give, it is His to annul" [Εἰ τοίνυν αὐτὸς ἔδωκε, κύριος ἂν εἴη καὶ λῦσαι πάλιν].[47] Abraham's encounter with and submission to Melchizedek was proof enough for Chrysostom that Christ as the giver of the law had exercised his option to annul the Sinai covenant. In his exegesis on Hebrews, Chrysostom asks, "And whence does it appear that [the first covenant] came to an end? He showed it indeed also from the Priest [i.e., Melchizedek], but now he

41. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 14, *PG* 63.113 (*NPNF1* 14.435).

42. See Chapter Four, section 3.

43. *De paenitentia* 6, *PG* 49.320. John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom: On Repentance and Almsgiving*, trans. Gus George Christo, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 81.

44. *In epistulam ad Galatas commentaries* 3, *PG* 61.655 (*NPNF1* 13.29).

45. Ibid. Here Chrysostom is referring to Gal. 3.24.

46. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 47, *PG* 55.215. John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 2 vols. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 1:308.

47. *In epistulam ad Galatas commentaries* 3, *PG* 61.655 (*NPNF1* 13.29).

shows more clearly by express words that it has been cast out" [δείκνυσι δὲ τρανότερον νῦν αὐτολεξεὶ, ὅτι ἐκβέβληται].[48]

Although Chrysostom states that Christ cast out the Sinai covenant, he refrains from severe disparagement of it. John likens the old covenant and its law to that of a garment that has begun to fray or a house that has decayed. In either case the owner repairs the garment or the house. In a similar fashion "the new [covenant] then has not simply caused the old to cease, but because it had become aged, as it was not [any longer] useful."[49] Neither the garment nor the house is inherently bad but each has simply become worn. John contends that the same is true of the old covenant, which scripture speaks of not "as evil, but only as having some fault and deficiency" [Οὐχ ὡς πονηρὸν τοίνυν ἐνταῦθά φησιν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἔχον τὸ αἰτίαμα καὶ ἐλάττωμα].[50] For Chrysostom, there is no incompatibility between the old and the new. Indeed, he tells his flock that "you will learn from comparison that the one is not contradictory to the other."[51] The old law has simply become worn out and thus "Christ reminds us that they had studied and possessed the old law for a long time, and that now it is time for them to ascend to a loftier law."[52]

The loftier law of which Chrysostom speaks was a spiritual law that was distinct from the old "law of carnal commandment" [οὐ κατὰ νόμον ἐντολῆς σαρκικῆς]. The priesthood of Abraham personified the fleshly and finite nature of the old law whereas the new was "according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become so not according to the law of carnal commandment, but according to a life that cannot end."[53] Thus we see the clear distinction Chrysostom makes between the old law and the new in which he states that "none of Christ's commandments are carnal commandments."[54] Chrysostom presents Abraham's inferiority to Melchizedek as a priest as symbolic of the inferiority of the old carnal law to the new spiritual law. Chrysostom saw the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek as a natural place to make such an association, since "many of the prescriptions of the law were devoted to the ministries of the priesthood."[55]

48. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 14, *PG* 63.113 (*NPNF1* 14.435).

49. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 14, *PG* 63.114 (*NPNF1* 14.436).

50. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 14, *PG* 63.115 (*NPNF1* 14.436).

51. *De paenitentia* 6, *PG* 49.321. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom: On Repentance and Almsgiving*, 83.

52. Ibid.

53. *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.925. Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, 199.

54. Ibid.

55. *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.925. Ibid.

According to Chrysostom's logic, if Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek was an indication that the priesthood was transformed, then it followed that the law which was associated with that priesthood would also change. Chrysostom's explanation was that "[the prophets] testified that the law will be changed, that the old commonwealth and way of life will be transformed for the better, and that never again will a king arise for the Jews."[56] Chrysostom's last point is an important one, for it points to a Christian polity ruled by the priest-king Christ who is the fulfillment of the scriptural prophecies.

Certainly, then, it is not a coincidence that Chrysostom made such a claim in his discourses, which were addressed to members of his flock whom he felt were unduly influenced by the claims of the local Jewish community and its leadership. The homage Abraham offered the non-Israelite/Gentile priest-king Melchizedek was a pointer to Christ, who was himself the high priest and king of the new Christian commonwealth.[57] The resulting question Chrysostom hoped his congregation would ask was, "If Abraham could submit to Christ in his encounter with Melchizedek who was only a type of Christ, why then could not Jews, who were the sons of Abraham, not to do the same to Christ who had since revealed himself?" Once again we see that in Chrysostom's exegesis, Abraham functions not as a typological figure but rather as a player in the divine economy.

Chrysostom emphasized Abraham's spiritual qualities and his role in the divine economy in order to bolster his assertion that Christians and not Jews were the inheritors of the promise. Paul's assertion that Christians constituted "one body"[58] led Chrysostom to remark that all "the faithful throughout the whole world, both which are, and which have been, and which shall be," believed in Christ [οἱ πανταχοῦ τῆς οἰκουμένης πιστοὶ καὶ ὄντες καὶ γενόμενοι καὶ ἐσόμενοι].[59] Chrysostom notes that Christ had said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad."[60] For Chrysostom, this was proof that Abraham, Moses, and the prophets and all those "that before Christ's coming pleased God" constituted one body with the Christian community [οἱ πρὸ τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ παρουσίας εὐηρεστηκότες, ἓν

56. Ibid., 200.

57. Paul Harkins observes that Chrysostom's reasoning was that "[t]he priesthood was the basis on which the law was given to the people. Hence, the passing away of the priesthood involves the passing away of the law." Ibid., 198.

58. Eph. 4:4.

59. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 10, *PG* 62.75 (*NPNF1* 13.99).

60. John 8:56.

σῶμά εἰσι].[61] Abraham and all the other exemplars of the Old Testament "both knew Christ and worshipped him" [εἰδότες δὲ αὐτὸν, καὶ προσεκύνουν].[62]

For Chrysostom, the spiritual qualities of Abraham, Moses, and the other Israelite saints bound them together with Christians who shared those attributes. The chief spiritual characteristic for Chrysostom in this regard was faith. Since, in Chrysostom's (and Paul's) eye's, the Abrahamic covenant was based on faith, then faith is greater than the law.[63] Indeed, Chrysostom argues that the law was necessary because the Israelites had lost faith and it was only through the advent of Christ that the true meaning of God's covenant with Abraham could be seen in the form of the new dispensation. As we saw in Chapter Two, Chrysostom believed that Abraham's faith was the seal of the covenant, not circumcision.

Chrysostom, in his interpretation of Romans, states that circumcision is not so much the problem but rather "those that hold ill to it."[64] Chrysostom, as always, had a pastoral point to make and tells his flock that "there is a natural law and there is a written law. But there is one also between these, that by works" [Ἔστι γὰρ νόμος ὁ φυσικὸς, καὶ ἔστιν ὁ γραπτός· ἀλλὰ καὶ μέσος τούτων ὁ διὰ τῶν ἔργων].[65] For Chrysostom, a person's works manifest adherence to either the natural or the written law. The problem, therefore, for both Jew and Gentile is in living the law they have received. The error of "the Greeks" is easily identified because of their ungodly life [ὁ γὰρ βίος αὐτῶν σφόδρα διέφθαρτο],[66] "but of the Jews, even if their life seemed to have been careless, still they had great means of cloaking these things in the law and circumcision, and the fact of God having conversed with them, and their being the teachers of all."[67]

Chrysostom argues that Abraham is the key to understanding the law, in that the great patriarch exhibited his works by faith. John followed the familiar polemical trope that Jews simply followed the letter of the law and sought justification from the strict observance of the law without understanding its spiritual meaning. Chrysostom, in his homily on Romans 9, employs a rhetorical device in which he repackages Paul's words for his audience, using his familiar, harsh tone to articulate what he feels to be the essence of Rom.

61. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 10, *PG* 62.75 (*NPNF1* 13.99).

62. Ibid.

63. See Chapter Two, in which I discuss Chrysostom's view that faith, not circumcision, was the true marker of the Abrahamic covenant.

64. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 6, *PG* 60.434 (*NPNF1* 11.370).

65. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 6, *PG* 60.435 (*NPNF1* 11.370).

66. Lit., "corrupt" [διέφθαρτο].

67. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 6, *PG* 60.439 (*NPNF1* 11.374).

9:30–31:[68] "For thou, O Jew, he says, hast not found even the righteousness which was by the law. For thou hast transgressed it, and become liable to the curse. But these that came not through the law, but by another road, have found a greater righteousness than this, that, namely, which is of faith."[69]

Chrysostom was fond of rewording Paul in order to draw a brutally clear conclusion for his audience. John takes the Pauline verse which says, "For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression,"[70] and explains that what "[Paul] says is of this kind: God 'promised that He would give the earth to Abraham and to his seed: but his descendants were unworthy of the promise, and of their own deeds could not be well-pleasing unto God. On this account came in faith, an easy action, that it might draw grace unto it, and that the promise might not fail.'"[71] Thus the failure of the Jews demanded that God extend the promise to the Gentiles in order that the promise to Abraham could be fulfilled.

In terms of the covenant and law, Chrysostom used Abraham both to promote Christian claims and diminish those of the Jews. The Abrahamic covenant was the starting point that found its terminus in the new covenant of Christ, which was, for John, the conclusion to which all of the saints of the Old Testament attested. The Sinai covenant and all it entailed was relegated to a mere accommodation by God that had long since fulfilled its purpose. John's presentation was eminently Pauline, but the homilist, in his own way, tied the pieces together in classic Antiochene style. John addressed any potential ambiguity of Paul's epistolary corpus to clearly present his view that Christ had personally "cast out" the Jews from their relationship with Abraham so that the Gentile nations could be brought into kinship with the patriarch and fulfill the promise that God gave him.

4. Chrysostom's Use of Diatribe

In his homiletical references to Abraham, Chrysostom frequently employs the type of diatribe against Jews that observers commonly associate with his eight discourses *Against Judaizing Christians*. Such language is part of the rhetorical technique of *psogos* (blame), the rhetorical counterpart to encomium (praise),

68. "What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness" (Rom. 9:30–31).

69. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 16, *PG* 60.563 (*NPNF1* 11.470).

70. Rom. 4:14–15.

71. *In Joannem* 51, *PG* 59.284 (*NPNF1* 14.182).

that Robert Wilken describes as "the use of half-truths, innuendo, guilt by association, abusive and incendiary language, malicious comparisons, and in all, excess and exaggerations."[72] Wilken explains that "with these words, the audience's ears pricked up and the chatter subsided, for the congregation knew it was in for a performance."[73] Ruth Webb notes that in the sophistic oratorical method, which Libanius taught and Chrysostom learned, "the possibilities for *psogos* were always present in virtual form in the knowledge of both audience and speaker. It is the unspoken other side of encomium that the encomiast has to argue against, and mere statement would not be enough, he needs to demonstrate, to show his reasons."[74] Thus the invective was an expected reality that had a rhetorical function but, as Elizabeth Jeffreys explains, it also "had a role in 'real life,' and was a useful weapon against opponents whose religious beliefs or intellectual stance might be dubious."[75]

For homilists such as Chrysostom, who utilized classical forms of speech such as paraenesis, the goal was not simply to extol what was virtuous but to condemn that which they saw as harmful. J. de Waal Dryden notes that, for Libanius, "paraenesis is divided into two categories, encouragement and dissuasion (προτροπὴν καὶ ἀποτροπήν)."[76] Within the rhetorical environment in which Chrysostom preached, it was not enough for John to simply encourage his flock to emulate Abraham, but he also had to discourage them from following the path espoused by Jews who also made claims about the patriarch. The Jewish position regarding Abraham was well known to John's flock (at least from the scriptural text). From the perspective of his audience, Chrysostom's failure to address Jewish claims to Abrahamic relationship with strong language would have constituted a glaring omission.

72. Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1983), 116.

73. Ibid.

74. Ruth Webb, "Praise and Persuasion: Argumentation and Audience Response in Epideictic Oratory," in *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-Fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 135.

75. Elizabeth Jeffreys, "Rhetoric in Byzantium," in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. Ian Worthington (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 173. Although the use of *psogos* has its roots in the sophistic methods of antiquity, its use continued long after Chrysostom. Jeffreys offers the famous *Secret History* of Procopius's invective directed toward Justinian and his wife Theodora as an example.

76. J. de Waal Dryden, *Theology and Ethics in 1 Peter: Paraenetic Strategies for Christian Character Formation*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 24.

Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen note that John Chrysostom is indiscriminate in his use of *psogos*.[77] Indeed, Chrysostom's use of *psogos* was not exclusively applied to Jews but was extended to whomever Chrysostom saw as an opposing ideological force, whether they were heretical Christians or defenders of the Roman religious cult. In one homily he may disparage women and extol men and in another he could reverse the praise and blame. In the rhetorical application of encomium and *psogos* there was a sense of symmetry in that the intensity of the praise contained in the encomium was matched by a proportionate level of invective directed against the target of blame. In the present case, the excessive praise of Abraham and the Christian claims to inheritance were matched by commensurate vituperative attacks directed at Jews and their claims to inheritance of the Abrahamic promise. The rhetorical methods employed by Chrysostom demanded the refutation of these claims with language that seems excessively harsh to the modern ear. Mayer and Allen conclude correctly that Chrysostom's "hostile statements against the Jews which recur throughout [his homilies] . . . should be read with this point firmly in mind."[78] Chrysostom was bound by the rhetorical conventions he employed, and his audience expected not only conformance to these conventions but also a degree of stimulation and entertainment.[79]

Certainly the figure of Abraham provided Chrysostom with an opportunity to stimulate his audience with such invective. Chrysostom was, to say the least, adept at exploiting every rhetorical opportunity provided by the scriptures. John the Baptist's admonition to the Jews who had gathered before him not to "think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'"[80] by itself prompted a host of incendiary comments by the homilist. Beyond such overt references, however, lies the battleground of ownership of the Abrahamic legacy and promise. In the language that Chrysostom uses to defend his view of Abraham we can discern both the importance he attaches to the patriarch as a pastoral and theological figure and also, to a certain degree, the arguments against his claims that he apparently perceived as emanating from the Jewish

77. Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom*, ed. Carol Harrison, Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 1999), 148–49.

78. Ibid.

79. Laurence Broadhurst notes, with regard to the theatrical style of the Second Sophistic, that "even the briefest reference to the Second Sophistic will mention its penchant for elaborate ornamentation. It is often suggested that in the Second Sophistic rhetoric is increasingly removed from the realm of forensics and into the domain of theatrics." Laurence Broadhurst, "Melito of Sardis, the Second Sophistic, and 'Israel'," in *Rhetoric and Reality in Early Christianities*, ed. Willi Braun, *Studies in Christianity and Judaism* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 58.

80. Matt. 3:9.

community. I say "apparently" because we know so little about the nature of the Jewish communities in fourth-century Antioch and Constantinople and any proselytizing or polemicizing in which they may or may not have engaged. Indeed, much of what we know about Jewish practices there derives from Christian sources.

Chrysostom's invective directed toward the Jewish community referencing Abraham primarily addresses Jewish claims to relationship to Abraham in general and relationship through circumcision in particular. John's repeated reference to the scriptural protestations of Jews that "We are children of Abraham" [τέκνα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ ἐσμεν] is a refrain that establishes the thematic foundation for an attack on real or imagined Jews who reject the Christian message and claims to Abrahamic inheritance. Chrysostom tells his flock to reject the assertion of the Jews that they and not Christians are the true sons of Abraham, since "on the basis of their evil ways they are in fact unworthy of such kinship" [ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν τρόπων κακίας ἀνάξιοι τυγχάνουσι τῆς συγγενείας].[81]

When Chrysostom describes the "evil ways" of Jews that separated them from Abraham, he did so in keeping with the rhetorical methods of the fourth century. Part of this method was to engage in a hypothetical debate with an imagined opponent.[82] In this dialogical style of diatribe the rhetorical foil for Chrysostom's censure is a composite Jewish figure, formed from the potential objections to the pastoral and theological points John wished to convey in his sermons. Such use of dialogical diatribe was part of the rhetorical tradition that Chrysostom inherited from Libanius and the usage of which stretches back to prominent practitioners of the method such as the Stoic philosopher Epictetus. If the sophistic tradition was not enough, certainly John had to look no further than his hero Paul, who used the form of an imaginary interlocutor in Rom. 11:17–24.[83]

The use of vocatives was a feature of the dialogical form of diatribe that Chrysostom employed in his contrived debates with manufactured Jewish opponents who took issue with his views on Abraham.[84] Chrysostom's censure

81. *In Genesim* 31, *PG* 53.288. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:246.

82. David Aune observes that "the dialogical style of diatribes makes frequent use of imaginary opponents, hypothetical objections, and false conclusions." David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, Library of Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 200.

83. For more on Paul's use of diatribe in his letter to the Romans, see Stanley K. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981). For a more recent work, see Changwon Song, *Reading Romans as a Diatribe*, Studies in Biblical Literature (New York: Peter Lang, 2004). Rudolf Bultmann also supported the idea that Paul engaged in a form of Stoic diatribe in Romans 11.

of fictitious Jewish "interlocutors" is not only consistent with the rhetorical style that was practiced by Epictetus, Plutarch, and Paul but was also something that John's audience thoroughly anticipated.[85] While the apostrophic vocative was often drawn from a set of select words such as "dog" or "beast," in Chrysostom's homiletical discourse on Abraham, the address of "You, O Jew" [ὦ Ἰουδαῖε] was sufficient.[86]

Examples of such usage of the vocative in hypothetical debates with Jews are found throughout Chrysostom's commentary on Abraham in questions and statements such as, "Why then, O Jew, do you place great store by circumcision? [Τί τοίνυν μέγα φρονεῖς, ὦ Ἰουδαῖε, ἐπὶ τῇ περιτομῇ];[87] "For thou, O Jew . . . hast not found even the righteousness which was by the law" [Σὺ μὲν γὰρ, ὦ Ἰουδαῖε . . . οὐδὲ τὴν ἐκ τοῦ νόμου δικαιοσύνην εὗρες];[88] "So to whom, tell me, is this said? To your obtuseness most of all, O Jew. Why, I ask you, was nothing of the like said to Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, or Moses, but only to you, when after the exodus from Egypt you made a calf?" [Πρὸς τίνα οὖν, εἰπέ μοι, ἐστὶ τὸ λεγόμενον; Μάλιστα μὲν ἐκεῖνα πρὸς τὴν σὴν ἀγνωμοσύνην εἴρηται, ὦ Ἰουδαῖε. Διὰ τί γὰρ τῷ Ἀβραὰμ οὐδὲν ἐλέχθη τοιοῦτον, οὐδὲ τῷ Ἰσαὰκ, οὐδὲ τῷ Ἰακὼβ, οὐδὲ τῷ Μωϋσεῖ, ἀλλὰ σοὶ μόνῳ, ὅτε ἐξελθὼν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐμοσχοποίεις;].[89]

84. Stanley Stowers contends that Paul used a similar dialogical interchange with a Jewish interlocutor in Rom. 3:1-9 as a didactic tool in order to provide "Paul's Gentile audience with a model of reasonable discussions with Jews." Stanley K. Stowers, "Paul's Dialogue with a Fellow Jew in Romans 3:1-9," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (1984): 722.

85. Changwon Song explains that "all the apostrophic vocatives are merely used to address the fictitious interlocutor with a harsh, censuring tone." Song, *Reading Romans as a Diatribe*, 39.

86. P. J. Ryan argues that Chrysostom's rhetoric most resembles that of Demosthenes, who was also fond of using strong language in personally addressing his opponents. Despite this similarity, Ryan contends that Chrysostom did not consciously model his speech after that of Demosthenes but rather sought to imitate "Gorgias and the later writers of the Stoic diatribe." P. J. Ryan, "Chrysostom: A Derived Stylist?," *Vigiliae Christianae* 36, no. 1 (1982): 12–13.The similarity to Demosthenes, in terms of the invective used against Jews and others in Chrysostom's homilies, is pronounced. Charles Darwin Adams describes the diatribe of Demosthenes and notes that "scattered all through the speech *On the Crown* are opprobrious epithets, sudden flings, bitter side remarks, often the more effective because inserted in some piece of elevated appeal or solid argumentation. 'Puppy . . . slanderer, scandal-monger, arrant tragic ape, rascal, enemy of the gods, . . . bawling and shouting . . . pompous orator . . . pest . . . you accursed round-shouldered clerk . . . you miserable actor . . . traitor . . . stupid . . . despicable . . . What could a man call you!'" Charles Darwin Adams, *Demosthenes and His Influence* (New York: Longmans, Green & Company, 1927), 65.

87. *In Genesim* 27, *PG* 53.243. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 167.

88. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 16, *PG* 60.563 (*NPNF1* 11.470).

Chrysostom also used the apostrophic vocative in the plural as he addressed theoretical groups of Jews to condemn their views. In one instance, John contrives a group of Jewish interlocutors who question Paul's assertion that "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."[90] In yet another instance, John imagines a debate between Paul and a group of Jews who ask the apostle, "Did not circumcision win righteousness for [Abraham]?" to which Chrysostom offers Paul's response, "Don't think, O shameless Jews [Μὴ νομίσητε, ὦ ἀναίσχυντοι Ἰουδαῖοι], that circumcision was of any avail for righteousness for him: having given evidence of faith in the time when he was uncircumcised, he heard the words, 'Now, Abraham had faith in God, and this was reckoned as righteousness in him.'"[91] Whether or not Chrysostom actually entered into an exegetical debate with the Jews of his day is impossible to determine, but his homiletical debates were nevertheless sufficient for his purposes. The sophistic rhetorical method provided adequate space to engage in a homiletical discourse with invisible Jewish adversaries, albeit on a playing field that most certainly favored the homilist. Indeed, the refutation of perceived Jewish claims could even take place across the expanse of time. In the example above, Paul's instruction to the Christian community in Rome was transformed into one of Chrysostom's dialogical diatribes to convey the Pauline doctrine on faith to his congregation.

In Chrysostom's commentary on Abraham he often uses polemical language to describe the unwillingness and inability of both scriptural and contemporaneous Jews to accept his understanding of the patriarch and his role in the Christian salvation economy. This language does not rise to the level of that found in his *Discourses against Judaizing Christians* and is by comparison (and for Chrysostom) somewhat reserved. Nevertheless, Chrysostom makes use of the language of diatribe most especially when speaking about whether it is Christians or Jews who possess true relationship to the patriarch and the promise that God gave to him.

Chrysostom sees the proclamation of Jews that they are "children of Abraham" as a sign of their "arrogance" [τὰ φρονήματα],[92] "haughtiness" [τὸ φύσημα],[93] "proud language" [μεγαληγορίαν],[94] "boastings" [τὰ αὐχήματα],[95] "vainglory" [κενοδοξίας],[96] and "their own self-importance" [οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι μέγα

89. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 110, *PG* 55.266. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:13.

90. Rom. 4.3.

91. Gen. 15:6. *In Genesim* 39, *PG* 53.367–68. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 386–87.

92. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 7, *PG* 60.441 (*NPNF1* 11.375); *In epistulam ad Titum* 6, *PG* 62.696 (*NPNF1* 13.540).

φρονοῦντες ἐπὶ τῷ πατριάρχῃ ἐβούλοντο εἰς τὴν τούτου συγγένειαν ἑαυτοὺς εἰσωθεῖν].[97] Chrysostom speaks of "the ungrateful and unresponsive Jews" [οἱ ἀγνώμονες καὶ ἀναίσθητοι Ἰουδαῖοι] who should know better but cannot "bring themselves to heed the blessed Paul shouting aloud about the patriarch."[98] In Chrysostom's eyes, the only possible explanation for the Jews' inability to accept the Christian teaching on Abraham was their arrogance, which blinded them from seeing that the Abrahamic promise was but a precursor for Christ. The advent of Christ and the apostolic mission (particularly that of Paul) was thus the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise that the patriarch would be the father of many nations. It is in this context that Chrysostom presents Jews as "parading the name of Abraham" [τὸν Ἀβραὰμ ἄνω καὶ κάτω παρέφερον] in order to extol their biological relationship and circumcision as markers of their relationship to Abraham.[99]

Chrysostom comments on the lack of virtue he sees in Jews, although this commentary is peripheral in nature and not central to his diatribe. In his homilies on Matthew, Chrysostom comments that Jews were satisfied with their biological relationship to Abraham and were "negligent about virtue in their own souls" [τῆς κατὰ ψυχὴν ἀρετῆς ἀμελοῦντες].[100] In a similar way he comments that Jews boast that, "We are the seed of Abraham, we are Israelites"; however, he adds, "they never mention their own righteous deeds."[101] Notwithstanding the virtuous qualities of the Jewish community, the principal point Chrysostom sought to convey was that emulation of Abraham's faith and virtue was the marker of relationship. For Chrysostom, the Jewish refusal to accept the Christian position regarding Abraham and promote their own covenantal claims, by necessity, implied their lack of virtue—and this was the central issue.

Chrysostom was not content to simply address theoretical Jewish antagonists in his homilies but also described the real or imagined reactions of Jews to his arguments and those of Paul, who vicariously responded to the Jews

93. *In Matthaeum* 3, *PG* 57.34 (*NPNF1* 10.16). *In Matthaeum* 9, *PG* 57.181 (*NPNF1* 10.59); *In epistulam ad Romanos* 7, *PG* 60.441 (*NPNF1* 11.375); *In epistulam ad Romanos* 8, *PG* 60.458 (*NPNF1* 11.388).

94. *In Matthaeum* 52, *PG* 58.521 (*NPNF1* 10.313).

95. *In Joannem* 54, *PG* 59.297 (*NPNF1* 14.192).

96. *In Joannem* 55, *PG* 59.302 (*NPNF1* 14.196).

97. *In Genesim* 31, *PG* 53.288. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 246.

98. *In Genesim* 39, *PG* 53.367. Ibid., 386.

99. *In Matthaeum* 3, *PG* 57.34 (*NPNF1* 10.16).

100. Ibid.

101. *In Joannem* 54, *PG* 59.297 (*NPNF1* 14.192).

through John's oratorical voice. Chrysostom perceived that the universality of the Christian message and corresponding extension of the Abrahamic covenant to the Gentiles particularly troubled Jews. This Jewish concern, Chrysostom says, centered about Jewish self-understanding that they possessed a unique and exclusive covenantal relationship with God as a chosen people. Chrysostom remarks that "the Jew is alarmed by his not having anything better than the rest, and being numbered with the whole world."[102] John depicts an ongoing debate between Christians on one side and Jews on the other in which "Jews kept turning over and over the fact, that the Patriarch, and friend of God, was the first to receive circumcision."[103]

Chrysostom animates his homiletical Jewish adversaries with a variety of emotional responses to the arguments contained within his sermons. Chrysostom is particularly concerned with communicating to his flock the Jewish reaction to his claim that Christians are the true children of Abraham since it is they and not the Jews who emulate the patriarch's faith. Thus, Chrysostom's language had a protreptic function in which he extolled the virtue of Christians in following the faithful example of Abraham and, as far as he was concerned, exposed the error of the Jews who, in their arrogance, neglected the virtue of their own souls.[104]

In Chrysostom's homilies he depicts Jews as responding in various ways. The Jewish interlocutor could be indifferent in response to John's rhetorical points and ask, "What matters it to me if Abraham was justified by faith?"[105] When these fictional Jews heard Chrysostom articulate the "indisputable" points of Paul's logic, they also exhibited fear. Chrysostom comments that the prospect that Christians were indeed right about Abraham "truly scared them" [ὃ μάλιστα αὐτοὺς ἐκφοβεῖ].[106] Along with indifference and fear, Chrysostom depicts Jews as angry about the loss of their exclusive relationship to Abraham. The Jew is "vexed" [ὁ Ἰουδαῖος ἀλγεῖ] and "cut to the heart" [ἐν τούτῳ πάλιν δάκνων τὸν Ἰουδαῖον] when he sees Gentiles enjoy the fruits of the Abrahamic lineage.[107]

102. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 7, *PG* 60.443 (*NPNF1* 11.377).

103. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 8, *PG* 60.454 (*NPNF1* 11.385).

104. James Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen describe the philosophers' classical use of sophistic protreptic speech as "censure of rivals and the praise of their own philosophies . . . in order to attract followers to their different way of life." James Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft (New York: De Gruyter, 2004), 121.

105. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 8, *PG* 60.459 (*NPNF1* 11.389).

106. Ibid.

107. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 19, *PG* 60.588 (*NPNF1* 11.490–91).

Chrysostom's depiction of the Jewish reaction to his rhetorical refutation of their beliefs regarding Abraham resembles something akin to the Kübler-Ross model of the five stages of grief. Perhaps it should not appear unusual that Chrysostom likens the Jewish reaction to the loss of a loved one. Chrysostom emphasized and exaggerated the Jewish reaction to his theological points concerning the Abrahamic covenant in order to convey to his flock the important role Abraham played in both the Christian narrative and the Pauline epistolary corpus. For Chrysostom, the theological stakes were high, and one gets the sense from his homilies that he believed whoever owned Abraham owned the entire Old Testament narrative. John's refutation of the Jewish claim to sole inheritance of the Abrahamic promise was, in reality, a refutation of Jewish claims to the entire narrative of the Torah. The rhetorical flourishes of John's sermons, such as his depiction of Jewish fear and anger in response to Christian attitudes toward Abraham, helped him make his case that Abraham was just as important for Christians as he was for Jews. Thus, Jews had to be presented as fearful and enraged at Christian claims in order to emphasize the importance of the issue to his Christian congregation.

One may most properly see Chrysostom's use of diatribe directed at Jews within the context of his attempt to emphasize the importance of Abraham in the Christian metanarrative. The focus of his diatribe on the issue of Abraham's relationship to Jews and Christians supports this conclusion. There is, as always, reference to the contention that Jews are not concerned with the virtue of their souls, but the central argument is not over whether or not scriptural or contemporaneous Jews are virtuous but whether or not virtue has anything to do with being a child of Abraham. In addition, the relatively mild language used (at least by Chrysostom's standards) does not indicate the presence of a contemporaneous pastoral issue such as that found in his *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*. For the most part, Chrysostom's diatribe against Jews with regard to the topic of Abraham is an amplification of Paul's theological presentation in general and his Epistle to the Romans in particular. Indeed, the diatribe found in John's homiletical commentaries on other books of the Bible also shows the influence of Paul's view of Abraham.

5. Conclusion

In summary, Chrysostom's view of Jews and Judaism with regard to Abraham was rooted in the basic suppositions that the Jewish relationship with Abraham had ended and that the new covenant of Christ had fulfilled the Abrahamic promise. Abraham thus played an important role in Chrysostom's integration

of the Old and New Testament narratives into a single, Christ-centered story. John, however, had to refute the central Jewish claims regarding their Abrahamic lineage and the relevancy of the Sinai covenant in order to convince his flock that Christians and not Jews were the natural inheritors of the Abrahamic promise and that the new covenant had replaced the old.

Chrysostom, following Paul's approach, viewed the emulation of faith and virtue as the true marker of Abrahamic lineage rather than circumcision. Jews, therefore, had to be presented as lacking in virtue and consumed by their "evil ways." If Chrysostom had concerns about the moral conduct of contemporaneous Jews, he did not mention it in his references to Abraham. In terms of Abrahamic lineage, the Jewish rejection of the Christian gospel and focus on observance of the law was evidence enough that they were "unworthy of Abraham."

Indeed, rejection of Christ and his gospel caused Christ to personally exclude the Jewish people from their relationship with Abraham and replace them with the Gentiles who were willing to accept the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise in the form of the new dispensation and live a virtuous life as a marker of their Abrahamic kinship. Chrysostom readily acknowledges that Abraham is the father of both Jews and Christians and that Jews have the potential to reclaim their inheritance, but only if they freely accept the new covenant that John claims Abraham foresaw and accepted. According to John, Christ separated the Jews from their relationship to Abraham in order to teach them that their salvation was not dependent on the Sinai covenant or even the Abrahamic covenant but rather on the fulfillment of both Old Testament covenants in the new covenant of Christ.

For Chrysostom, therefore, the Abrahamic covenant was, from the very beginning, intended as a precursor to the Christian covenant that God gave to embrace all peoples of the earth. Chrysostom found evidence of this underlying Christological theme in the witness of the Old Testament saints, whom he believed affirmed and testified to the authenticity of his position. For Chrysostom, Abraham's encounter with and submission to the priest-king Melchizedek is evidence of the superiority of the new covenant to come and Abraham's acceptance of this arrangement. Indeed, Chrysostom contends that the Old Testament saints were in communion with their Christian "brethren" and possessed the same exemplary faith. While the Abrahamic covenant was, by definition, greater than the Sinai covenant both because of its antiquity and its Christological associations, the Sinai covenant was by no means inconsequential but served simply as a temporary bridge to the new covenant of Christ foretold

by Jeremiah. Thus the old law was worn out and replaced by a newer, more spiritual law.

If the Apostle Paul engaged in a form of Stoic diatribe to help support Christian claims to Abrahamic lineage, as scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann suggest, then it is unsurprising that John Chrysostom did the same (albeit with a much greater intensity consistent with his homiletical style). This style dictated and the audience expected some form of invective to both entertain them and help explain the superiority of the orator's claims. John was as hyperbolic in his blame (*psogos*) as he was in his praise (encomium). In assessing Chrysostom's use of diatribe, it is important to note that Jews were by no means the sole target of John's invective, nor was John the exclusive practitioner of this method of oratory.

John used the dialogical form of diatribe to help frame the debate and allow him to refute the claims of the Jewish straw man he had fashioned. The dialogical debates permitted John to personalize Paul's references to Abraham's relationship to Jews and Christians in a way that could never be accomplished through a straight liturgical reading of the apostle's epistles. Jews were disparaged along the way to diminish if not explain their position. If Jews did not comprehend the truth Chrysostom presented, then it must be on account of their arrogance. If Jews did not subscribe to faith and virtue as markers of Abrahamic lineage rather than circumcision, then they must be deficient in both qualities. If Jews did not accept the new covenant, then they must not fully comprehend the spiritual meaning of the old. In this presentation of virtue and vice we see that the rhetorical standards of paraenesis and protreptic speech were well maintained by the Antiochene homilist. The Jewish position was neatly presented as diametrically opposed to the Christian and therefore easily dismissed.

For John Chrysostom, Abraham was a critical figure with which he differentiated his Christian community from its ethnic Jewish origins. In many ways, it is impossible to fully understand how he understood Jews and Judaism apart from his understanding of Abraham. For John, Abraham was the starting point of his Christological narrative and the point where he sees Jews begin their separation from the grand overarching narrative that culminates in the resurrection of Christ. The covenant at Sinai was only a stopgap measure by God to help Israel on its inexorable march to the new covenant and the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. The Jewish claim that they were the true children of Israel, grounded in the very understandable concept of biological lineage, was a bump in that narrative that Chrysostom felt was important enough to address. The invective John uses in doing so is an indication of

the importance he attaches to the subject as well as the potential legitimacy of Jewish claims to Abrahamic legacy in the eyes of his congregation. Put another way, a homilist in charge of forming his flock does not waste time or energy refuting that which needs no refutation.

6

De beato Abraham: An Authentic Homily of John Chrysostom

1. Introduction

As I mentioned at the outset, one of the challenges associated with the examination of Chrysostom's treatment of Abraham is the lack of a single homily or series of homilies on the patriarch. While one can argue that Chrysostom's references to Abraham in his commentaries encompassing Genesis 12–25 essentially constitute a set of homilies on the patriarch, the focus of these sermons was the explanation of the Genesis narrative itself first and an exposition of the prominent figures of the scriptural text second. A homily on Abraham attributed to John Chrysostom, however, exists in the listing of the questionable works of the Antiochene homilist.

The early compilers of Chrysostom's works gave the sermon the title of *De beato Abraham* as an equivalent rendering of the most common heading assigned in the Greek manuscripts "Λόγος εἰς τὸν μακάριον Ἀβραὰμ" ("Sermon on the Blessed Abraham").[1] These same compilers of Chrysostom's *Opera Omnia* had differing opinions with regard to the authenticity of the text. This difference of opinion led J. P. Migne to categorize the homily as *dubia* or unlikely that of Chrysostom. The brevity of several manuscripts made assessing both the authenticity and the integrity of the text in question problematic. A search of the *Pinakes* database of the *Institut de recherche et d'histoire des texts* (IRHT) indicates that there are twelve available manuscripts of *De beato Abraham*, dating from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries. Three of the twelve manuscripts are

1. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.737–46. The homily is listed in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* as *BHG* 2347; and in the *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* as *CPG* 4514. In some of the manuscripts the homily is titled "Λόγος εἰς τὸν δίκαιον Ἀβραὰμ" [Monè Batopediou]; [Oxford Bodleian]; "Λόγος εἰς τὸν Ἀβραὰμ" [Lyon]; [Monè Pantokratoros]; [Vatican, Barb. gr. 583]; [Vatican, Ottob. Gr. 264]; and "Λόγος εἰς δίκαιος Ἀβραὰμ" [Oxford Holkham].

incomplete, which may have contributed to some of the doubts surrounding the homily.

The homily, divided into three parts, is an encomium to the patriarch as a man of virtue. The homilist of *De beato Abraham* crafted his encomium to Abraham in a manner that is consistent with the sophistic rhetoric to which John adhered. Abraham is the central subject of the homily and the *akedah* the principal act that the homilist uses to showcase the virtue of the patriarch. The homily also contains a diatribe against imagined opposing Jewish views, part of which includes an examination of the Exodus event. The homilist ends his sermon with a Chrysostomic homage to the Apostle Paul and an exhortation to his flock that they emulate Abraham so that the Patriarch can receive them into his bosom.

An analysis of *De beato Abraham* indicates that the sermon bears many of the traits characteristic of Chrysostom's homiletical references to Abraham. Notwithstanding its tenor and tone, the sermon also possesses many of the technical traits consistent with both Chrysostom's view of Abraham and the manner in which he conveyed this view. The Chrysostomic character of the homily is clearly visible in the opening question that John asks his flock: "Do you see the vigorous gray hair and the ripe old age?" [Εἴδετε πολιὰν σφριγῶσαν, καὶ γῆρας ἀκμάζον;].[2] Indeed, similarities of vocabulary and structure (such as the use of the adjective πολιὸν to describe Abraham and beginning the homily with a question) are visible throughout the introduction of the homily, a fact to which even skeptics such as Bernard de Montfaucon acceded. The reader will notice in the introduction of *De beato Abraham* many of the prominent associations Chrysostom made with regard to Abraham throughout his homilies, such as Abraham's bodily and spiritual virtue and his ability to overcome the ravages of age and remain a champion of virtue. The homilist describes this virtue through the use of agonistic language and military metaphors and terms that are so common to both Chrysostom's oratory and his presentation of Abraham. Within *De beato Abraham* one find a variety of the sophistic methods that Chrysostom employed, such as the rather unique use of plants as a metaphor or even the more common references to sailing and farming.

In the presentation of the *akedah*, the homilist makes many of the associations found elsewhere in Chrysostom's corpus and employs the rhetorical device in which the homilist imagines the reactions of the scriptural figures both based on the actual circumstances of the narrative and even in a contrived

2. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.737.

situation. An example of one such contrived situation presented in *De beato Abraham* is how Sarah might have reacted had she known that her husband was about to sacrifice the son to whom she gave birth so late in her life. In this situation as well, the homily has a Chrysostomic voice in the extended discussion on parenthood and the sacrificial love of a mother for her child.

Obviously, scholars, so far removed from the actual writing of a text such as this, may find pronouncing it authentic difficult. Despite this general qualification, it is my belief that the homily is indeed a work of John Chrysostom, owing to the way one may situate it among other works of more certain authenticity and the treatment accorded to Abraham within it. While I am convinced Chrysostom is indeed the one who preached the sermon, in my comparison of *De beato Abraham* to the accepted works of John Chrysostom I refer to the preacher of the sermon as "the homilist" in order to differentiate the homily from Chrysostom's other works and thus make the distinctions clearer.

An English translation of the homily, which I undertook as part of this investigation, follows in Appendix A and is useful as a guide when reading this section. All English quotations referenced in this chapter are taken from this translation. Appendix B presents a table of references from *De beato Abraham* that are similar to those found in the accepted Chrysostomic corpus.

2. Early Assessment of the Text

Although the early assessment of *De beato Abraham* was mixed, the homily is presently listed in the *Patrologia Graeca* in the category of "dubia" or of doubtful authenticity.[3] The introduction to the Migne edition, taken from Bernard de Montfaucon's *Opera Omnia*, describes the differing opinions with regard to the authenticity of the text. Henry Savile (1549–1622), John Bois (1561–1644), and Louis-Sébastien Le Nain de Tillemont (1637–1698) along with Montfaucon (1655–1741) all questioned the authenticity of the sermon. Fronton du Duc (1558–1624) and John Hales (1584–1656),[4] however, placed the work among the authentic texts of Chrysostom. While Montfaucon concedes that the

3. "In Abrahamum patriarcham. Vertit Fronto Ducæus. Dubium an Chrysostomi. Fabr. Antea media parte truncatam jam integram inter spurias dedit Montf." *S. Joannis Chrysostomi Operum Index Alphabeticus*, *PG* 51.1341–42. Migne most likely took the middle ground between Fronton du Duc's positive assessment and Montfaucon's identification of the text as spurious.

4. John Hales, an English scholar, was an assistant to Henry Savile and helped prepare the notes for Savile's 1612 Eton compilation of Chrysostom's works. See Chrysostomus Baur, *S. Jean Chrysostome et ses œuvres dans l'histoire littéraire* (Paris: Louvain/Fontemoing, 1907), 84.

beginning of the homily is consistent with Chrysostom's work, he contends that the entirety of the sermon "indicates a foreign style."[5]

Although the compilers of Chrysostom's works were divided over its authorship, Migne nevertheless resisted the outright categorization of the homily as "spuria." Some of the manuscript copies of *De beato Abraham* used in the early compilations of Chrysostom's works were unfortunately incomplete, which I believe very well may have led to uncertainty with regard to the authenticity of the homily.[6] In Montfaucon's evaluation of the text, he notes the general impression of some of the early compilers of Chrysostom's works that the homily did not have the tenor and tone consistent with that of the Antiochene homilist. Montfaucon attributes to this lack of familiarity the principal criterion used to categorize the homily as pseudo-Chrysostomic. Nevertheless, even Montfaucon, who questioned the Chrysostomic nature of the text, saw something "extremely familiar"[7] in the beginning of the homily in which the homilist asks his congregation, "Do you see the vigorous gray hair and the ripe old age?" [Εἴδετε πολιὰν σφριγῶσαν, καὶ γῆρας ἀκμάζον;].[8]

The absence of any other individual homily or series of homilies with the singular focus of Abraham no doubt made an accurate appraisal of *De beato Abraham* problematic for the early compilers of Chrysostom's works. The present inquiry's more holistic examination of Chrysostom's encomium to Abraham found spread throughout the corpus of his works enables a more rigorous evaluation of the attribution of *De beato Abraham* to Chrysostom. It demonstrates that the homily is indeed consistent both with Chrysostom's view of the patriarch and the language he used to communicate that view.

3. Manuscript Tradition

There are twelve copies of *De beato Abraham* preserved in whole or in part. The earliest manuscript is dated to the tenth century and the most recent to the sixteenth century. A list of the existing manuscripts is presented in Table 1 in chronological order:

5. "Integram itaque illam asserimus, non perinde genuinam: stylus enim Chrysostomo indignus videtur, orationis genus et nervis destitutum, uno verbo multa peregrinitatem olent." John Chrysostom, "Quæ fertur de Beato Abraham Oratio, e codice Coisliniano CXLVII emendata et suppleta," ed. L. Sinner (Paris: Apud Gaume Fratres, Bibliopolas, 1835), 5.

6. The three abbreviated manuscripts are Oxford Bodleian; BNF gr. 759; and BNF gr. 797.

7. ". . . tum etiam ordiendi modus Chrysostomo perquam familiaris." Chrysostom, "Quæ fertur de Beato Abraham Oratio, e codice Coisliniano CXLVII emendata et suppleta," 2.

8. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.737.

Table 1. List of Manuscripts

1. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France,
gr. 797, ff. 101–7v (mut.) (10thc.)

2. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France,
gr. 759, ff. 233v–35v (mut.) (10th–11thc.)

3. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France,
gr. 1458, 237–41v (11thc.)

4. Lyon, Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon,
0625 (542), 39–45v (12thc.)

5. Athens, National Library of Greece,
981, ff. 230v–36 (14thc.)

6. Mount Athos, Pantokratoros Monastery,
6 (Lambros 1040), 72v–75v (14th c.)

7. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. T.1.1 (misc. gr.),
145 bis–46 bis (mut.) (14thc.)

8. Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica, Barb. gr.
583 (olim vi. 22), 863–71 (14thc.)

9. Mount Athos, Vatopediou Monastery,
636 (olim 551), 142–52v (15thc.)

10. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Coislin
147, pars II, 325v–32 (15thc.)

11. Oxford, Holkham Library, gr.
25 (91), 167v–74v (16thc.)

12. Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica, Ottob. gr.
264, 201v–8v (16thc.)

The manuscripts labeled "mut." indicate copies that are incomplete. The manuscript BnF gr. 797 ends at *PG* 50.743 line 35.[9] The manuscripts BnF gr. 759 and Oxford, Bodleian, Auct. T.1.1 both end at *PG* 50.740 line 50.[10] The compilations of Chrysostom's works by Henry Savile and Fronton du Duc both reflect these latter two truncated manuscripts. The remaining manuscripts are intact and are consistent with the complete manuscript as presented in Montfaucon's and Migne's editions without any significant variations. Prior to this study, a French translation of *De beato Abraham* represented the only translation of the work into a modern language.[11] For the purposes of this investigation, I used the Migne text as a base text for my analysis and English translation.

4. Outline of *De beato Abraham*

The homily on Abraham is divided into three parts. The first part examines the virtuous qualities of Abraham in general and his bodily virtue in particular. This presentation of the physical attributes of the patriarch is followed by an examination of the *akedah* in which the reactions of both Abraham and Sarah are illustrated by the homilist. The first part of the homily ends with an imagined monologue by Sarah in which the homilist contemplates what her reaction might have been had she known the intent of her husband to sacrifice their son as noted above.

In the second part of the sermon, the homilist examines Abraham's reaction to the events of the *akedah*. Abraham's "philosophy" appears along with his bodily and spiritual virtue in order to explain how he overcame nature so as to be obedient to God. There is a pastoral component to the second part of the homily in which the homilist attempts to relate the experience of Abraham to that of his contemporary audience, especially with regard to parenting. Whereas in the first part, the homilist imagines Sarah's reaction had she known Abraham's intent, in the second part he imagines the possible reaction of the two servants who accompanied Abraham and Isaac to Mount Moriah. The

9. "Εἶτα τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ παρελθόντων ἐπῆλθε τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ ἐκάλυψε τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους." Approximately 20 percent of the homily is missing at this point.

10. "Εἶτα συμποδίζεται ὁ Ἰσαὰκ, καὶ οὐ σφαγιάζεται· ἦλθε γὰρ ἄνωθεν φωνὴ . . ." The manuscripts end in mid-sentence and the transcriber indicates that the rest is missing. Approximately 44 percent of the homily is missing at this point.

11. John Chrysostom, *Oeuvres complètes de Saint Jean Chrysostome: D'après toutes les éditions faites jusqu'a ce jour / nouvelle traduction française par l'abbé*, trans. J. Bareille, 21 vols. (Paris: Vivès, 1865), 4:532–44.

second part ends with a discussion of the typological association between the *akedah* and the crucifixion of Christ.

The third part of the homily is an attempt by the homilist to relate the events of the *akedah* to a diatribe against disbelieving Jews. In this diatribe, the homilist argues that the witness of Abraham illustrates both the connection of the Old Testament events to those of the New Testament and the power of God to work miracles. The final part of the sermon is an excursus on the Exodus event and how Jews were saved by God and yet nevertheless, to the homilist's dismay, deny the salvation offered by Christ to whom the events of the *akedah* point. The homily ends with a request that the members of the congregation endeavor to imitate Abraham so that one day they may achieve salvation and repose in his bosom.

5. Comparison to Chrysostom's Overall Presentation of Abraham

The homily *De beato* Abraham exhibits many of the characteristics found in Chrysostom's overall presentation of Abraham in his works, especially in terms of the sophistic rhetorical tradition to which Chrysostom adhered. The homilist begins his sermon extolling the bodily virtue of Abraham, even though he is advanced in age. The first sentence contains a three-part interrogative in which the preacher asks his congregation, "Do you see [Εἴδετε] the vigorous gray hair [πολιὰν] and the ripe old age? Do you see the noble athlete take a battle stance [παραταξάμενον] toward nature and heart? Do you see a man in extreme old age hard as steel [ἀδάμαντος]?"[12] Montfaucon concedes that an opening sentence that asks the question, "Do you see?" [Εἴδετε;] is a familiar Chrysostomic convention and notes that it occurs thirteen times in other sermons.[13] The question asked refers to a previous homily or possible scriptural reading of which the homilist assumes his audience is aware.

Chrysostom's exegetical exposition on Abraham as a model of physical and spiritual strength despite his old age was a common theme in John's

12. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.737.3–6.

13. "Certe conciones tredecim apud Chrysostomum occurrunt hoc vel simili principio." Chrysostom, "Quæ fertur de Beato Abraham Oratio, e codice Coisliniano CXLVII emendata et suppleta," 2. As examples, Montfaucon cites Chrysostom's *In Genesim* 39, *PG* 53.360 where the homily begins, "Do you see [Εἴδετε], dearly beloved, how there is nothing idle in the contents of Sacred Scripture?" and *In Genesim* 23, *PG* 53.196, which also begins with "Do you see [Εἴδετε] in what has been said already the extent of God's loving kindness and the surpassing degree of his longsuffering?" John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 3 vols., Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 87, 374.

homilies, and was in keeping with Stoic and other philosophical norms. In his commentary on Acts, John similarly asks his flock to ruminate on Abraham "the elder" as a "moving picture . . . gray-headed [πολιὸν], girded up, digging and working with his own hands."[14] Later in *De beato Abraham*, the old patriarch was again described as "stronger than iron and steel" [σιδήρου εὐτονώτερος, καὶ ἀδάμαντος στἐῤῥότερος].[15] In his *Homily* 4 on Genesis, Chrysostom tells his flock that "the grace of God, you see, makes us stronger than steel" [ἀδάμαντος γὰρ ἡμᾶς στἐῤῥοτέρους].[16] The use of the metaphor of steel [ἀδάμας][17] for physical and spiritual strength is common in the Chrysostomic corpus. Indeed, the beginning of Chrysostom's *Homily* 48 on Genesis, in which he describes Abraham's encounter with the sons of Heth,[18] bears a striking similarity to the beginning of *De beato Abraham*. In this homily, Chrysostom makes reference to the previous lesson in which he discussed the binding of Isaac and says to them, "You saw yesterday, beloved, the courage of the patriarch; you saw a soul stronger than steel" [Εἴδετε χθὲς, ἀγαπητοὶ, τοῦ πατριάρχου τὴν ἀνδρείαν· εἴδετε ψυχὴν ἀδάμαντος στἐῤῥοτέραν].[19]

John enlarges upon the association between Abraham's advanced age and his spiritual characteristics, alluded to above. In his commentary on Abraham, Chrysostom describes how Abraham's faith allowed him to overcome the weakness of his body.[20] The homilist of *De beato Abraham* declares that "old age is in bodies and agelessness is in the soul" and presents an image of the patriarch that conforms to this maxim.[21] In the sermon, Abraham's old age is "magnified by achievements" [κατορθώμασι].[22] The word "κατορθώμασι" is a Stoic category denoting virtuous deeds and moral achievements, which Chrysostom also used to describe Job as a man who, without the benefit of education or role models, nevertheless achieved virtue. Chrysostom then observes that Abraham, as well, "along with his other virtuous deeds [τῶν

14. *In Acta apostolorum* 18, *PG* 60.147.

15. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.737.42.

16. *In Genesim* 4, *PG* 53.40. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 1:53. In similar fashion, Chrysostom explains again in his commentary on Genesis that a life of virtue makes someone "stronger than any steel" [ἀλλὰ παντὸς ἀδάμαντος στἐῤῥοτέρους ἡμᾶς γίνεσθαι]. *In Genesim* 4, *PG* 53.204. Ibid., 101.

17. Literally the word means "adamant," which denotes a hard substance, most likely steel. Adamant can also denote a diamond.

18. Gen. 23:5–6.

19. *In Genesim* 4, *PG* 53.434.

20. See the discussion of "Virtues of the Body and Virtues of the Soul" in Chapter Two.

21. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.738.20.

22. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.738.17.

ἄλλων κατορθωμάτων] also accomplished this splendid action."[23] In *De beato Abraham*, as in Chrysostom's general treatment of the patriarch, the homilist presents Abraham as an old man who derives his physical strength from his great faith. In this regard, Chrysostom instructs his flock and says, "It is said that faith is patient, imitate the blessed Abraham, who was past the prime of age and yet became as a ripe fruit."[24] In a similar fashion, the homilist of *De beato Abraham* describes Abraham as an old man who was "slack with respect to the strength of the flesh but was well toned and strong in terms of the strength of faith."[25] As in Chrysostom's general treatment of the patriarch, the homilist does not discount the fact that Abraham is old but rather demonstrates that the virtue and strength of his soul enabled him to accomplish such great achievements even despite his advanced age.

In the introductory paragraphs of the homily, one finds agonistic language that describes Abraham as "an athlete" ready for battle. Such language, so common in the writings of Paul and in those of great sophistic orators, bears a striking resemblance to that which Chrysostom used throughout his homiletical portrait of Abraham. *De beato Abraham* depicts the patriarch as "the athlete struggling against nature for the prize, sparring with his insides, and arming himself against nature" [ὁ ἀθλητὴς, καὶ πρὸς φύσιν ἀγωνιζόμενος, καὶ πρὸς σπλάγχνα πυκτεύων, καὶ κατὰ τῆς φύσεως ὁπλιζόμενος].[26] The military metaphor of a "battle stance [παραταξάμενον] toward nature and heart" has its counterpart in Chrysostom's description of the "battle and array" [μάχης καὶ παρατάξεως] that Abraham employed to free his nephew Lot.[27] The homilist of *De beato Abraham* contrasts the patriarch with a typical old man who is "not able to prepare himself for battle [παρατάξασθαι], nor able to mount a horse, nor throw a spear, nor brandish the shield."[28] John's presentation of Abraham

23. *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae*, *PG* 47.384. John Chrysostom, *A Comparison between a King and a Monk. Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life: Two Treatises*, trans. David G. Hunter, vol. 13, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1988), 173.

24. "Εἰ λέγετε πίστιν ὑπομένειν, μιμήσασθε τὸν μακάριον Ἀβραὰμ, τὸν παρηκμακότα τῇ ἡλικίᾳ καὶ καρποὺς ὡρίμους δεξάμενον." *Sermo cum iret in exsilium*, *PG* 52.436. Elsewhere, Chrysostom makes a similar observation and paints a rhetorical picture of Abraham as one who is "past the prime of age and yet became as a ripe fruit. ". . . τὸν παρηκμακότα τῇ ἡλικίᾳ καὶ καρποὺς ὡρίμους δεξάμενον." *Sermo cum iret in exsilium*, *PG* 52.436.

25. "Κεχάλαστο μὲν αὐτοῦ ὁ τόνος τῶν σαρκῶν, νενεύρωτο δὲ αὐτοῦ ὁ τόνος τῆς πίστεως." *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.737.7–8.

26. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.739.31–33.

27. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 29, *PG* 60.659.

28. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.737.16.

as a soldier fighting against nature and for the cause of virtue is a staple of his Abrahamic commentary. Thus, Chrysostom describes Abraham as a righteous man who "lifted up the great prize when he had arrived at maturity; for then he destroyed the tyranny of nature."[29] In a similar fashion, the homilist of *De beato Abraham* describes Abraham as a man who was "in extreme old age" [ἐν ἐσχάτῃ πολιᾷ] yet nevertheless "battled against nature and won a great trophy" [πρὸς φύσιν ἐμάχετο, τρόπαια νίκης μεγάλα στήσας].[30]

Abraham, however, as a classic model of virtue, did not battle against nature simply to win a trophy. The homilist of *De beato Abraham* wants his congregation to "learn" that Abraham "did not obey because of this (i.e., to receive a reward)."[31] Chrysostom likewise wanted his congregation to understand that Abraham did not struggle to "add show to victory, nor erect a trophy."[32] In both cases, the preacher, in keeping with Greek philosophical norms, had to convince his audience of the virtue of the heroic Abraham since virtue must be sought after for virtue's sake and not for reward.

Abraham, as a classic model of virtue, appears for both John and the homilist as a hero battling against nature in order to obey God's command. In *De beato Abraham*, the patriarch "throws aside nature [τὴν φύσιν῾ ρίπτει] and embraces the love of God,"[33] and is "struggling against nature" [πρὸς φύσιν ἀγωνιζόμενος],[34] "arming himself against nature" [κατὰ τῆς φύσεως ὁπλιζόμενος],[35] and "tramples upon nature" [κατεπάτει τὴν φύσιν].[36] The emphasis on Abraham's battle against nature in *De beato Abraham* is understandable given the focus of the homily on the *akedah*. In his commentary on Genesis, Chrysostom recognized that the binding of Isaac was likewise "a task beyond the powers of human nature" [καὶ ὑπερβαῖνον ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν τὸ πρᾶγμα].[37] Indeed, Chrysostom used strong rhetorical language to

29. *Messis quidem multa*, *PG* 63.517.

30. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.737.40–41.

31. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.738.29–33.

32. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 35, *PG* 61.302 (*NPNF1* 12.213).

33. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.738.31–32.

34. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.739.31–32.

35. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.738.33.

36. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.740.40–41

37. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.429–30. Chrysostom expands upon Abraham's victory over nature and says of him that "like a dutiful servant he set aside every human consideration and had one single concern, to put into effect the command; as though transcending human nature and putting all compassion and fatherly [430] affection second to God's commands, he hastened to their discharge." Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:16–17.

describe Abraham's victory over nature, particularly with regard to the *akedah*. When Abraham obeyed God, "nature was dashed to the ground with all her weapons, with all her host: and he stood with outstretched hand, grasping not a crown, but a knife more glorious than any crown, and the throng of angels applauded, and God from heaven proclaimed him conqueror."[38] Throughout his encomiastic presentation of Abraham, Chrysostom describes the various achievements of the patriarch as a battle against and overcoming of nature. In addition to the *akedah*, Chrysostom notes that Abraham had to "abandon even nature"[39] in order to leave the land of Ur as God commanded him. Abraham's and Sarah's conception of Isaac was also a triumph over nature, for "the power of nature had remained without effect."[40]

Another common Chrysostomic rhetorical feature found in *De beato Abraham* is the use of sailing and farming metaphors to describe Abraham's physical and spiritual virtue. Thomas Ameringer notes that the "sophistic trait of Chrysostom's art" is seen in the "theatrical tone of some of his metaphors," an example of which are "metaphors taken from sea and from navigation."[41] Ameringer also notes that "a considerable number of comparisons are taken from agriculture and gardening."[42] As in the case of the aforementioned military metaphors, the homilist explains that just as an old man is unable to "brandish the shield," so too is he "not able to be seated upon the tiller, nor traverse the sea, nor handle the oar for rowing, nor hang a sail, nor battle the opposing winds, nor endure the fierceness of the cold, nor be able to do any such thing."[43] In terms of farming, "neither is he able to drag the plow, nor cut through the furrow, nor break horses, nor have the strength to deal with oxen, nor battle the heat of the sun, nor the swelling of the heat, nor the weight of the spade, nor any other thing that is useful for the earth—but he sits in the house, having old age as his advocate."[44]

38. *On the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* 3, *PG* 61.413 (*NPNF1* 12.291).

39. Ibid.

40. *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt*, *SC* 79.10.

41. Thomas Edward Ameringer, *The Stylistic Influence of the Second Sophistic on the Panegyrical Sermons of St. John Chrysostom: A Study in Greek Rhetoric* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1921), 62. The use of sailing metaphors is a common Stoic usage with which Christians were well acquainted. Indeed, one need look no further than the preeminent Apostolic father from Antioch, Ignatius, who in his *Letter to Polycarp* echoed such clearly Stoic language: "For as the wind aids the pilot of a ship, and as havens are advantageous for safety to a tempest-tossed vessel, so is also prayer to thee, in order that you may attain to God." *Epistola ad Polycarpum*, *PG* 5.721 (*ANF* 1.94).

42. Ibid., 74.

43. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.737.22–26.

44. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.737.28–34.

At the beginning of his eight sermons offered on Genesis, Chrysostom associates spiritual growth with seafaring and farming.[45] With regard to Abraham, Chrysostom uses a sailing metaphor to compare his congregation's spiritual struggles with that of Abraham when he declares that "we too are sailing over a great and wide sea, full of many monsters, and of many rocks, and bringing forth for us many storms, and from the midst of serene weather raising up a most violent tempest. It is necessary then if we would sail with ease, and without danger, to stretch the sails, that is, our determination: for this is sufficient for us. For Abraham also, when he had stretched forth his affections toward God and set before Him his fixed resolution, what else had he need of? Nothing: but 'he believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.'"[46] Elsewhere, Chrysostom instructs his flock to imitate Abraham as a model of virtue when they see him "amid so great an uproar and surge of waves sailing as in a calm, take thou in hand in like way the helm of obedience and fortitude."[47] Chrysostom also describes Abraham as someone who "sailed on a sea that was not favorable."[48]

The athletic, military, sailing, and farming metaphors the homilist used in *De beato Abraham* to describe patriarch's bodily and spiritual qualities is consistent with that used in the sophistic oratory to which Chrysostom adhered. The presentation and structure of the homily, as exemplified in the initial "Do you see?" [Εἴδετε;], also resembles Chrysostom's homiletical style in general and his use of that style in his Genesis homilies in particular. One can see that in the first part of the homily, the homilist, strikingly like Chrysostom's practice, is engaged in a conscious attempt to fulfill the requirements of encomium outlined in Chapter One.

A homiletical exegesis of the *akedah* follows the presentation of Abraham's virtuous credentials. The homilist of *De beato Abraham* was concerned with the reaction of the other participants in the binding of Isaac. The reaction of Sarah was of particular concern, and the dialogical style often employed by

45. "Spring is welcome to mariners, spring is welcome also to farmers. But spring is not as welcome either to mariners or to farmers as the time of fasting is to people intent on having sound values, which for the souls is spring of the spiritual kind, real tranquility for our reasoning" [Ἡδὺ μὲν ναύταις τὸ ἔαρ, ἡδὺ δὲ καὶ γηπόνοις· ἀλλ' οὔτε ναύταις, οὔτε γηπόνοις οὕτως ἡδὺ τὸ ἔαρ, ὡς τοῖς βουλομένοις φιλοσοφεῖν ἡδὺς ὁ τῆς νηστείας καιρὸς, τὸ πνευματικὸν τῶν ψυχῶν ἔαρ, ἡ ἀληθὴς τῶν λογισμῶν γαλήνη]. *In Genesim (sermones 1–9)* 1, *PG* 54.581. John Chrysostom, *Eight Sermons on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), 21.

46. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 34, *PG* 63.236 (*NPNF1* 14.521).

47. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 3, *PG* 61.415 (*NPNF1* 12.292).

48. *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt*, *SC* 79.13.

Chrysostom was well suited to describe her reaction. In *De beato Abraham*, the homilist imagines what Sarah might have said had she discovered her husband's intentions. Indeed, the homilist argues that Abraham did not tell Sarah because upon hearing the news Sarah would have sought to restrain Abraham and say, "Where are you taking your son whom I received against all hope, whom I received according to the promise, whom I received in return for the hospitality, whom God gave to me as a gift in extreme old age? Where are you leading him? Where are you taking him? Nothing is revealed to you! For how has God revealed to you that he seeks the son who he gave and for whom I hoped? He gave him to me and he takes him? If he gave him to me just to take him, it would have been better if he didn't give him to me at all. For it is less pain to not have had him than to take him and destroy him."[49]

Chrysostom engages in a similar rhetorical exercise in which Abraham rather than Sarah asks the questions. Chrysostom tells his flock that Abraham was so remarkable because he did not "reason within himself" and ask "What does this mean? He who granted me offspring contrary to all expectation, he who in his characteristic love brought to life the infertile womb of Sarah, now after the child's suckling and growing and finally coming of age bids me have him put to death and sacrificed as a burnt offering; he who a little before said, 'Your descendants will be called after him,' now gives a contrary command.'"[50] In the passage presented above from *De beato Abraham*, Sarah describes her son Isaac as the one she "received in return for the hospitality" and Chrysostom too singled out this passage when referring to Isaac as "the one born of the meal . . . the fruit of hospitality."[51]

Sarah is also the subject of an imagined dialogue in Chrysostom's homilies. Chrysostom, in order to describe the virtue of Sarah, at times used a similar rhetorical device as a way to remind his flock of what Sarah did *not* say. When Abraham departed to rescue his kinsman Lot, Chrysostom notes that Sarah did not ask, "O man, where are you going, thrusting thyself down precipices, and exposing thyself to so great hazards; for one who wronged you and seized on all that was yours, shedding your blood? Yea, and even if thou make light of thyself, yet have pity on me [who has] left house and country and friends and

49. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.738.50–739.5.

50. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.429. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:16.

51. *Ne timueritis cum dives factus fuerit homo* 1, *PG* 55.509. John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 3 vols. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2003), 3:101. See also *Salutate Priscillam et Aquilam*, *PG* 51.193 in which Chrysostom mentions that "along with his companion wife [Abraham] made the fruit of hospitality" [καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα κοινωνὸν ἐποίει τῶν τῆς φιλοξενίας καρπῶν].

kindred, and has followed thee in so long a pilgrimage; and involve me not in widowhood, and in the miseries of widowhood."[52] Elsewhere, a similar device is employed to describe Sarah's reserve when Abraham invited the three angelic visitors into his tent, for she did not ask, "What? Did I marry you with the expectation that you would turn me, your wife with so much wealth, into a miller and baker? Do you have three hundred and eighteen slaves, and instead of choosing to give them orders, you give me this job?"[53]

In *De beato Abraham* the homilist also investigates the potentially adverse reaction of the two servants that accompanied Abraham and Isaac to Mount Moriah, had they known Abraham's intent. In the homily, Abraham "left the servants behind so that they would not overpower him by force."[54] Chrysostom makes a similar reference to Abraham's desire to avoid possible opposition from the two servants accompanying the patriarch and Isaac (as well as from Sarah) when he says that Abraham "intent upon offering up a pure victim . . . would not defile it with tears, or with any opposition."[55]

The homilist of *De beato Abraham* notes that Abraham, on several occasions, demonstrated prophetic capabilities such as when he told his servants that he and Isaac "will come back to you"[56] and when he told Isaac that "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering."[57] Thus "Abraham prophesized unknowingly—the divine grace working together with him."[58] Chrysostom, likewise, noted that Abraham "uttered a prophecy that God would provide Himself a burnt offering in His Son, and it also came true at the time."[59]

In both *De beato Abraham* and Chrysostom's homilies, Abraham, like other virtuous figures, is called a philosopher. We saw in Chapter Two that, for Chrysostom, the term "philosopher" had both a pagan and Christian sense and it is, of course, in the latter sense that John assigned the appellation to Abraham. The homilist of *De beato Abraham* maintains this convention and refers to the patriarch as "the philosopher Abraham" [ὁ φιλόσοφος Ἀβραὰμ].[60] Chrysostom

52. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 26, *PG* 61.221 (*NPNF1* 12.155).

53. *Ne timueritis cum dives factus fuerit homo* 1, *PG* 55.506. Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, 3:96–97.

54. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.741.7–8.

55. *In epistulam i ad Timotheum* 14, *PG* 62.578 (*NPNF1* 13.458).

56. Gen. 22.5.

57. Gen. 22:8.

58. "Ἄκων προεφήτευσεν ὁ Ἀβρᾶὰμ, τῆς θείας χάριτος αὐτῷ συνεργούσης." *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.739.44–46.

59. *In epistulam i ad Timotheum* 14, *PG* 62.578 (*NPNF1* 13.458).

60. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.739.31.

was similarly emphatic and declared that Abraham was a "philosopher" in the purest (i.e., for him Christian) sense of the term [ὁ φιλόσοφός ἐστι].[61]

One can also see notable similarity in how Abraham acts and reacts to the events of the *akedah* itself. In *De beato Abraham*, the homilist ponders the possible inner thoughts of the patriarch as he engaged in the sacrificial act. When Isaac calls out to Abraham and addresses him as "Father," the homilist declares that the terms "father" and "son" were "stripped bare of reality." Similarly, Chrysostom observes that Abraham "chose to lose the name of father, to show himself a faithful servant. Wherefore he became not a father only, but also a priest."[62] The homilist of *De beato Abraham* used Isaac's call of "Father" as the catalyst to spur his discussion of Abraham's emotions at the moment of the *akedah.* When the homilist arrives at the point in the narrative in which Isaac addresses Abraham as "Father," he asks a series of rhetorical questions: "How did his knees not shatter into pieces? How did his limbs not break? How did his mind not suffer these things he heard from his son, Isaac? . . . How did the hand not become numb? How did the sword not fall from his hand? How did he not completely dissolve and break into pieces? How did he have the strength to stand and see Isaac bound? How did he not suddenly remain as one dead? How did his sinews support him? And how did his resolve endure?"[63]

In his homily on the Genesis narrative of the binding of Isaac, Chrysostom asks many of the same and similar questions with regard to Abraham's ability to carry out the sacrifice of his son and also provides a potential answer. Chrysostom explains that "it was by faith that [Abraham] carried all this out and was not shattered to see that what was required of him was the opposite of what was promised."[64] Chrysostom uses Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"[65] as a prompt for a series of questions similar to those presented in *De beato Abraham*. John asks, "How was his hand able to hold the fire and the sword? . . . Consider, I ask you, the torture in this for the good man: how he put up with hearing the words, how he had the strength to reply to his son, how he did not fall apart, how he managed to conceal the truth and not reveal to his son what was about to happen."[66] Chrysostom also expresses amazement "at the good man's fortitude in being able to build an altar of sacrifice, in having the strength, in not collapsing under the anguish . . . how his soul did not part

61. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 21, *PG* 62.153 (*NPNF1* 13.156).

62. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 3, *PG* 61.414 (*NPNF1* 12.292).

63. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.740.3–14.

64. *In Genesim* 49, *PG* 54.444. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:42.

65. Gen. 22:7.

66. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.431. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:18–19.

company with his body, how he managed to bind him with his own hands and place on the faggots his beloved, his graceful, his only begotten son."[67]

These questions prompt the homilist of *De beato Abraham* to examine the pain a parent feels when a child suffers. The homilist engages his audience and asks for the parents in attendance to empathize with Abraham as he prepared to sacrifice his son. In the homily, the reactions of both fathers and mothers is related to the experience of Abraham, and with regard to the latter the mother's reaction to a child in sickness is one in which "for her the present life is nothing, nor the future, but for her it is more precious to take the illness of her child upon herself."[68] The role of parenthood and the love of parents for their children was a familiar trope in Chrysostom's homilies.[69] In Chrysostom's homily *On the Statues*, John uses the example of "a mother, when she beholds her son in a fever, while she witnesses his sufferings from choking and inflammation, frequently bewails him, and says to him, "O my son, would that I could sustain thy fever, and draw off its flame upon myself!"[70]

Chrysostom's belief that Isaac was indeed "sacrificed" and "slaughtered" although not killed is also presented in *De beato Abraham*. The dichotomy is clearly presented when the homilist explains that Abraham "was to see the martyr Isaac living and not living, dead and not dead. Inasmuch as, on the one hand, he died because of the offering of the father, on the other hand, he did not die due to the benevolence of God—for he was a type and image of the Master. The type was useful and anticipates the truth. Then Isaac is bound but not slaughtered."[71] As we saw in Chapter Four, Chrysostom repeatedly made reference to the slaughter and sacrifice of Isaac and that although "Abraham didn't bloody the knife . . . [he] completed the sacrifice nonetheless."[72]

In *De beato Abraham*, the homilist, as in Chrysostom's sermons, makes the typological connection between the *akedah* and the crucifixion [τὸν τύπον ἔχῃ τοῦ τὸν σταυρὸν βαστάζοντος Σωτῆρος].[73] The homilist seeks to demonstrate the similarity of the two acts and compares "[Isaac] with the wood upon his shoulders and Christ with the cross upon his shoulders; Isaac did not sin and

67. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.431. Ibid., 3:19.

68. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.740.33–35.

69. See Douglas O'Roark, "Parenthood in Late Antiquity: The Evidence of Chrysostom," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 40, no. 1 (1999).

70. *Homiliæ de statuis* 13, *PG* 49.142 (*NPNF1* 9.430).

71. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.740.49–52.

72. *In sanctum Eustathium Antiochenum*, *PG* 50.601. John Chrysostom, *The Cult of the Saints*, trans. Wendy Mayer and Bronwen Neil (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 55.

73. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.741.19–20.

was about to be slaughtered, Christ did not sin and he was to be crucified; [Isaac] slaughtered and yet not slaughtered, and the only begotten Son of God was slaughtered and not slaughtered, died and yet did not die."[74] As we saw in Chapter Four, the association of the *akedah* with the crucifixion was a typological formulation that Chrysostom could not resist. In commenting on the binding of Isaac, Chrysostom explains to his audience that "we know the son was offered in sacrifice, and we gather something else contained in the thought by mention of the son, namely, the Cross."[75]

In the third part of *De beato Abraham*, the homilist uses the typological association of the *akedah* with the crucifixion to begin a dialogical diatribe against Jews who question the miraculous events that took place in the New Testament narrative. The homilist argues that Jews should not question the virgin birth of Christ but should "remember and say, 'How did Sarah give birth?'" [πῶς ἡ Σάῤῥα ἐγέννησε;].[76] The homilist of *De beato Abraham* uses the familiar encomiastic device of plants in order to describe the virgin birth. The homilist asks, "Tell me then, how the earth, being virgin, brought forth innumerable species of plants?" In Chapter Two we saw that Chrysostom used plants in his ekphrastic rhetoric.

The homilist of *De beato Abraham* also engages in the type of dialogical diatribe against Jews that is common within Chrysostom's corpus. *De beato Abraham* repeatedly used the type of apostrophic vocative discussed in Chapter Five, "O Jew" [ὦ Ἰουδαῖε]. The homilist of *De beato Abraham* addresses his hypothetical interlocutor with the familiar "Explain to me O Jew" [Ἑρμήνευσόν μοι, ὦ Ἰουδαῖε][77] and "Tell me, therefore, O Jew" [Εἰπέ μοι οὖν, ὦ Ἰουδαῖε][78] as he seeks to refute their imagined responses to his position. A significant amount of the diatribe present in *De beato Abraham* pertains to Moses and the Exodus event. Throughout Chrysostom's commentary on Abraham (and other figures of scripture) it is not uncommon for the exegesis or diatribe to diverge in order to support the overarching theme. Indeed, Chrysostom often interjected Abraham into a variety of topical examinations for such a purpose, including those from the New Testament.

74. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.741.40–46.

75. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 47, *PG* 55.209. John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 2 vols. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 1:299.

76. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.742.3–4.

77. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.742.28–29.

78. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.743.35.

The homilist ends *De beato Abraham* with a comparison between the blood of the Passover lamb and the blood of Christ. The homilist addresses his fictional interlocutor and asks him, "Are you saved by the blood of the lamb and I am not saved by the blood of the Master?"[79] This question is a reference to Heb. 9:14–14 in which Paul asks in similar fashion, "If the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ?" Chrysostom, in his seventh discourse *Against Judaizing Christians*, makes a similar association as part of his diatribe against the Jews in an effort to prove that the Christian sacrifices were superior to the Temple sacrifices.[80]

The closing lines of the homily contain another Pauline and personal reference about a spiritual ascent, which is also used to make a distinction between what the homilist sees as the material journey of Moses and the spiritual journey of Paul.[81] The Pauline spiritual ascent is another familiar Chrysostomic theme.[82] Chrysostom makes a similar personal association at the close of a sermon on Gen. 11:31 when he compares Abraham's journey from Haran to the journey upon which both he and his flock have embarked. John tells his flock that, unlike Abraham, "we . . . are not called to leave one country for another, but to leave earth for heaven."[83] There is a soteriological component to the end of the sermon as the homilist asks that he and his congregation "endeavor to imitate Abraham in order that we may be received into his bosom" [Σπουδάσωμεν οὖν καὶ ἡμεῖς, ἀγαπητοὶ, τὸν Ἀβραὰμ μιμήσασθαι, ἵνα ξενισθῶμεν ἐν τοῖς τούτου κόλποις].[84] Chrysostom similarly exhorts his flock to "follow in the footsteps of this patriarch by practicing virtue" in order "to be transported into his bosom" [Νήφωμεν τοίνυν, παρακαλῶ, ἵνα κατ' ἴχνος τοῦ πατριάρχου τούτου τὴν ἀρετὴν μετιόντες . . . εἰς τοὺς τούτου καταντῆσαι κόλπους].[85]

79. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.744.42–43.

80. *Adversus Judaeos* 7, *PG* 48.921.

81. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.745.4–5.

82. See Margaret M. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation*, vol. 40, Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 145.

83. *In Genesim* 31, *PG* 53.291. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:252.

84. *De beato Abraham*, *PG* 50.746.1–3.

85. *In Genesim* 42, *PG* 54.387. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:421.

6. Conclusion

In my opinion the homily, *De beato Abraham*, is an authentic sermon of John Chrysostom. The depiction of Abraham and the language used in the homily is entirely consistent with John's treatment of the patriarch and, moreover, there are neither deviations from this treatment nor novelties present that should lead one to question the authenticity of the text. Indeed, all the major encomiastic pieces that constitute Chrysostom's homiletical treatment of the patriarch and appear in this present work are found in *De beato Abraham*. Appendix B contains a table comparing references from *De beato Abraham* to similar ones found at various points in the accepted Chrysostom corpus. A survey of these references reveals a similarity in language and rhetorical style that is consistent with what appears throughout Chrysostom's works but without an exact replication of language that might imply plagiarism on the part of another author. In addition, these similarities are not concentrated in one or two homilies, which would suggest appropriation, but can be identified throughout the breadth of the Chrysostomic corpus. Despite these similarities, one must still address the concerns of Montfaucon and the other compilers who questioned the authenticity of the homily.

Montfaucon believed that the homily did not exhibit the richness of Chrysostom's typical oratory, and he thus reached the conclusion that "Chrysostom was counterfeited" and that whoever wrote the homily "borrowed from other homilies of the saintly doctor."[86] Montfaucon, however, made such an assessment without being any more specific as to the likely forger. Thus Montfaucon did not offer any substantive arguments against authenticity outside of his belief that *De beato Abraham* lacked a "familiar" tone. Indeed, if "familiarity" is the criterion used to assess the authenticity of the text, then the positive assessment of Fronton du Duc and John Hales is as equally valid as the negative characterization of Montfaucon, Savile, Bois, and Tillemont. Lacking any concrete objections to the language and content of the homily, we are left with a categorization of *De beato Abraham* based solely upon the impression the text made on any one of these compilers of Chrysostom's works, either positive or negative.

One tenable contention that could assuage these concerns is the possibility that *De beato Abraham* is an early work of a young John Chrysostom who

86. ". . . quibus nos libenter adstipulamur, arbitramurque , quempiam levioris armaturae in haec, se castra conjecisse, et Chrysostomum ementitum esse, ordiendique modum ex aliis S. doctoris homiliis mutuatum esse." Chrysostom, "Quæ fertur de Beato Abraham Oratio, e codice Coisliniano CXLVII emendata et suppleta," 6.

had not yet completely developed his full-throated homiletical voice yet nevertheless had started to formulate his encomiastic vision of Abraham. In support of this assertion, one can consider that Chrysostom offered his homilies on Genesis, to which the homily in question favorably compares, very early in his career as a Christian preacher. With regard to Chrysostom's eight homilies on Genesis, Laurence Brottier notes that "several scholars have seen an indication of shyness due to [John's] inexperience at the pulpit in the exordium of sermon II, where John defers to the prayers of individuals whom he refers to as πρόεδροι."[87] As a general rule, sermons on Genesis were offered during the Lenten season. Brottier dates the eight homilies on Genesis at 386, since we are relatively certain that during Lent of 387 John preached his famous homilies *On the Statues* and during the period of Lent in 388 he was occupied by his larger set of homilies *On Genesis*. Brottier concludes that, since it is unlikely that the shorter set of eight homilies predated the more extensive set of sixty-seven sermons, then it is likely that the eight homilies on Genesis were preached during Lent of the previous year of 386. On this basis, one could assert that the *De beato Abraham* homily was preached very early on in John's career as a preacher, perhaps even at the same time as his eight homilies on Genesis, as part of his Lenten catechetical duties. It is indeed striking that the first of Chrysostom's eight homilies on Genesis and *De beato Abraham* both begin with the use of seafaring and farming metaphors.

As we saw in the comparison section of this chapter, the presentation of Abraham in *De beato Abraham* is entirely consistent with Chrysostom's encomium rhetoric presented in this present study. The homily exhibits this consistency in a thoroughly organic way. In *De beato Abraham*, the homilist describes a patriarch who is every bit the philosopher and Stoic sage as that in virtually every reference Chrysostom made to Abraham. Within the homily we see all of the critical elements that made Abraham a model of bodily and spiritual virtue along with the exhortation to his flock to emulate that model. In *De beato Abraham* the patriarch is old yet vigorous and battles against nature. The adjectives and metaphors that the homilist used to describe Abraham are part of the Chrysostomic lexicon of virtue. Abraham is a "philosopher" [φιλόσοφος], "gray-haired" [πολιός], and "stronger than steel" [ἀδάμαντος στὲῤῥότερος],

87. "Plusieurs savants ont vu dans l'exorde du sermon II, où Jean s'en remet aux prières de ses confrères qu'il nomme πρόεδροι, le signe d'une timidité due à l'inexpérience de la chaire." The term πρόεδροι refers to members of the church leadership who were in attendance. John Chrysostom, *Sermons sur la Genèse*, trans. Laurence Brottier, Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Cerf, 1998), 11.

who struggles like an "athlete" [ἀθλητής], "battled against nature" [πρὸς φύσιν ἐμάχετο], and earned his "trophy" [τρόπαιον].

Chrysostom's preeminent purpose in his sophistic presentation of Abraham was to fashion a model of virtue for his flock to emulate. In *De beato Abraham* the homilist makes the same exhortation to his flock to "imitate Abraham" [τὸν Ἀβραὰμ μιμήσασθαι] that appears in virtually every extended Chrysostomic reference to the patriarch. The homilist made pastoral observations, such as references to parenting, which are also entirely consistent with Chrysostom's works and have their cognates throughout the corpus of his homilies and discourses. Indeed, one could easily conceive that the *De beato Abraham* reference to a mother who grieved the sickness of her child was a precursor to the other very similar reference noted above, which Chrysostom preached in his homilies *On the Statues* in 387.

From a theological perspective, the sermon is representative of Chrysostom's theology as much from what is *not* said as from what is said. Within *De beato Abraham* there is no hint of allegorical digression but rather a strict adherence to the Antiochene approach that tolerates only the merest modicum of typological association such as in the reserved association of the *akedah* with the crucifixion. With regard to the attempted sacrifice of Isaac, the homily, as in Chrysostom's treatment of the events of Genesis 22, emphasizes that Abraham in fact "slaughtered" [ἐσφάγη] his son by intent if not by deed. The principal theological point of Chrysostom's view of Abraham, however, was the soteriological significance of the patriarch. This soteriological significance is ensconced in the closing sentences of *De beato Abraham* in which emulation of the patriarch is linked to reception into the bosom of Abraham and salvation after death.

Heretofore, I have made extensive reference to the entire corpus of John Chrysostom's works in an effort to describe his view of Abraham. If the homily *De beato Abraham* was integrated into the corpus of authentic works attributed to John Chrysostom, it is clear that references to the homily would populate the footnotes of this investigation without difficulty. Put another way, if the assessment of Fronton du Duc and John Hales had convinced Montfaucon and later Migne to place the homily within the canon of authentic Chrysostomic texts, it is difficult to imagine any objection to the inclusion of the Abrahamic references found within *De beato Abraham* in this present work. Given that there are no substantive arguments against the authenticity of the text on the part of those who questioned its authenticity and the overall consistency of *De beato Abraham* with the entirety of Chrysostom's view of the patriarch in content and form, I must agree with the manuscript tradition that dates from

the tenth century and lists “John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople” as the author of the “Sermon on the Blessed Abraham” as well as the assessment of Fronton du Duc and John Hales, both of whom believed that *De beato Abraham* is an authentic work of John Chrysostom.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this investigation has been to examine the ways in which John Chrysostom made reference to the patriarch Abraham as part of his homiletical discourse in order to determine the Antiochene father's rhetorical, pastoral, and theological conception and applications of the Old Testament patriarch. Although, at first glance, references to Abraham may appear scattered and disconnected, the reality is otherwise. Even though there is no individual homily or series of homilies on Abraham in the corpus of Chrysostom's works, from his hundreds of references, one can derive a vivid portrait of Abraham. This portrait, while varied and detailed, reveals not only Chrysostom's understanding of Abraham as an Old Testament figure but also his view of how his Christian faith related to the sacred scripture of the Jewish people.

1. A Christian Saint and Stoic Sage

John Chrysostom has long been noted for his rhetorical genius, which even his most ardent critics conceded. Chrysostom's numerous references to Abraham are indicative of his creativity and skill as both a preacher and pastor, for in these references the Antiochene exegete transformed the Father of Israel into both a Christian saint and Stoic sage. So thorough was this transformation of the great patriarch of Israel that, within his homiletical exegesis of Abraham, we can see that John did not so much argue that the church had replaced Israel but rather he attempted to convince his flock that Israel was the church. In order to persuade his flock, however, Abraham's Christian credentials had to be communicated in an understandable and convincing fashion. Chrysostom thus presented Abraham within the categories of virtue with which his flock was familiar.

Chrysostom, most certainly, was not an innovator in this regard. Philo had presented Abraham in Hellenistic terms so that the Greco-Roman world could appreciate his greatness. The Apostle Paul, at least as far as John understood him, saw Abraham as the father of Christians who were the fulfillment of the promise that God gave to the patriarch. Chrysostom's genius, therefore, was not in his originality but in the way he synthesized the rhetorical and theological concepts that he inherited as an orator and a priest. In this synthesis, John applied Greek

philosophical categories to transform a thoroughly Jewish figure into the image of a model, Christian man.

John's task was facilitated by the scriptural narrative in which Abraham's great deeds were described. Abraham possessed traits that were well suited to the classical characteristics of virtue. No doubt, these characteristics were quite attractive to a homilist who was well schooled in sophistic methods and took on the task of transforming his congregation into faithful Christians. Indeed, in Chrysostom's treatment of Abraham, even the patriarch's apparent deficits were sources of virtue. It was simply an added benefit that Abraham was also theologically significant to the Christian understanding of the Old Testament in general and to Paul in particular.

The results of this present inquiry demonstrate that John deftly conceived his virtuous model. Between the lines of the scriptural text, Chrysostom saw a Stoic sage, a philosopher par excellence, in keeping with the universal norms of virtue. As John himself acknowledged, it was only necessary for him to "strip him" bare in order for all to see "what a philosopher he was."[1] John saw Abraham's physical strength in his ability to overcome adversity even in old age and engage in a battle against nature in order to achieve virtue. Throughout his homilies, John argued that Abraham's ability to follow the virtuous path, despite his lacking education or religion, demonstrated the patriarch's personal greatness. John saw courage in Abraham's undertaking of the *akedah*, wisdom in the way he managed his household, and righteousness in the way he assisted those in need. John captured Abraham's classical virtue in explicit rhetorical flourishes.

John clothed Abraham in encomiastic rhetoric. Chrysostom was fully aware that he needed to contextualize his subject in order for his audience to apprehend him. The Roman world had standards of discourse to which John was well equipped to adhere. The Jewish patriarch thus became a warrior, a sailor, a fisherman, and a farmer. Chrysostom spared nothing as he extolled the virtue of his Old Testament hero. Resorting to metaphors drawn from the world of sport, to which Chrysostom knew his congregants were deeply devoted, he placed Abraham in the center of the arena and showered him with hyperbolic praise as he placed the rhetorical crown of victory upon the brow of the patriarch.

While Abraham appeared outwardly sophistic, he was nevertheless thoroughly Christian. John used the image of the Stoic sage to draw his audience into his speech. His intent, however, was not simply to convince

1. *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 21, *PG* 62.153 (*NPNF1* 13.156).

his audience that Abraham was an acceptable exemplar in the classical sense but rather to present the Jewish patriarch as a thoroughly Christian figure in keeping with the Pauline theology on Abraham. The classical virtues were superficial and pertinent only inasmuch as they indicated the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity lurking beneath the surface.

Abraham's true value was in this transition from classical to Christian virtue. For Chrysostom, the Christian flesh beneath the philosophical clothing was emblematic of the way in which Abraham overcame nature and transcended bodily and spiritual limitations. If the Stoic sage was, in reality, a Christian saint then the same was true for John's Christian congregation. The pedagogical aspect of personal transformation, however, hints at something larger in John's presentation of Abraham in that it was not only the individual Christian that John sought to transform but Roman society as a whole. John told his flock that Abraham possessed all of the virtues that Roman culture held in high regard, but the patriarch's true virtue and value was much deeper than this. Therefore, in Chrysostom's estimation, Abraham's value as Christian saint *and* Stoic sage was greater than his role as a Christian forerunner.

2. A Father and Monk

Chrysostom, when he referred to Abraham, repeatedly cried out to his flock, "Let us imitate him." Furthermore, we have seen that there were a variety of aspects of Abraham's character that John felt to be worthy of emulation. These aspects were, at times, as varied and seemingly opposed as Abraham's virtuous qualities. In the same way that Chrysostom presented Abraham as an old man who was strong and an uneducated man who was wise, so too did he describe Abraham as the son of an idolater who was eminently faithful to God, a father and husband who possessed the virtue of a celibate monk, and a rich man who rejected material possessions. Abraham was a seeming contradiction in terms, but to John Chrysostom such anomalies all made perfect sense.

John's presentation of these seeming contradictions was more than a simple rhetorical device; it was a pastoral tool. Homiletical time and space was a precious commodity, and Abraham possessed the inherent qualities necessary for him to serve as a model for a wide variety of constituencies in Chrysostom's congregation. The young and the old, the rich and the poor, the celibate and the married all had something to learn from Abraham, the great man of virtue. Abraham's multifaceted virtue thus had multiple pastoral applications. Chrysostom's admission that he "often . . . and on all occasions" made reference to Abraham so that his flock could "imitate him" illustrates John's awareness of this fact.[2] John melded the rhetoric of virtue with the scriptural narrative

and made Abraham a preeminent pastoral tool. Where the scriptural narrative was deficient, John was not at all averse to filling in the missing features of Abraham's life in order to round out the patriarch's story and create further opportunities through which he could extol the patriarch's virtue.

Through his admonishment of his faithful to emulate Abraham in their daily lives, John sought to transform fourth century Roman life in Antioch and later Constantinople one soul at a time, one household at a time, and one community at a time. Abraham thus serves as the prism through which we can observe the spectrum of needs within John's flock. John, despite being a celibate monastic, was exceedingly concerned about family life. A powerful aspect of John's view of Abraham was the patriarch's ability to overcome adversity and excel in Christian virtue. Children could thus learn from Abraham since, without the benefit of good parentage or monetary wealth, he nevertheless became a model parent and a wealthy man. Parents and couples could also learn from their "father" Abraham who earned his title as the "father of many nations" as much within the confines of his tent and his household as he did on Mount Moriah.

The rich, who often stepped over the poor who surrounded the church within which Chrysostom preached, also needed to learn from the wealthy patriarch who distributed his material possessions to every soul that crossed his threshold. No doubt, the parable of Lazarus and the rich man hovered over John's homiletical references to the wealthy Abraham's philanthropy even if the preacher never referred to the eschatological image of the poor man in the embrace of father Abraham and the rich man who languished in the flames. There was no Trinity for John's flock to see at Mamre, only Christ posing as the least of his brethren and who suddenly appears hungry and waits to be fed.

Chrysostom's pastoral references to Abraham indicate that he applied scripture in a contextual fashion, tailoring the narrative to suit the particular pastoral needs he wished to address in his sermon. Abraham was well suited to this approach due to the nature of the Genesis narrative accounts of his life and the way in which the patriarch fit the sophistic rhetorical framework within which Chrysostom crafted his homilies. One such prominent example presented is the seeming dichotomy in which Chrysostom depicts Abraham as a celibate monk and also as a dutiful husband who divides the household labors equally with his wife. While such diverse applications of scripture might very well vex the more systematically inclined modern reader, for Chrysostom, the

2. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 35, *PG* 61.302 (*NPNF1* 12.213).

pastor and priest, it was merely an indication of the depth and profundity of scripture.

3. A Historical and Eschatological Bridge

In John Chrysostom's theological outlook, Abraham was both a historical and eschatological bridge. Abraham connected Christians to the creative God of Genesis and pointed them to an eschatological future in which the ultimate goal was repose in the patriarch's bosom together with the long-suffering Lazarus. Chrysostom used Abraham as a reference point from which his flock could look backward to see from where they came and forward to see the place to which they were going.

Chrysostom expounded and expanded on Pauline intertextual precedents for Christian possession of the Abrahamic lineage in order to lay claim to the Old Testament narrative. For Chrysostom, Abraham's faithfulness prior to circumcision and the Exodus event created a level playing field from which he could separate Jewish and Christian claims to Abrahamic succession. Chrysostom's seemingly contradictory approach to the patriarch did not end with his pastoral associations but were also part of his theological presentation of Abraham. In Chrysostom's homilies, Abraham was both the preeminent father who sired all Christians through his faith and a Christian saint in line with the great figures of early Christianity. At the same time, however, Abraham was also the representative of the inferior Jewish priesthood who submitted to Melchizedek, the forerunner of the Christian priesthood. Although, as I already mentioned, it might seem that Chrysostom's homiletical presentation of the patriarch lacked focus, in reality, Chrysostom's exegetical approach was hardly arbitrary. Chrysostom extolled Abraham as a thoroughly Christian figure while at the same time he noted that the patriarch pointed to something greater.

Chrysostom's homiletical references to the *akedah* reflect this mixed attitude. John, despite his Antiochene roots, did not avoid the typological association of the attempted sacrifice of Isaac with the crucifixion. Abraham's preeminent function, however, remained as a model of virtue for his flock to emulate. Within the context of John's overall presentation of the patriarch, it is difficult for one to expect anything less in the central act of the Abrahamic narrative. Although John's rhetorical portrait of Abraham's virtue was distributed throughout countless sermons, it nevertheless conveyed a singular image of the courageous Stoic sage battling adversity in order to follow the path of virtue. One can hardly blame John for making Abraham's virtue the focus of his homiletical references to the *akedah*, even if it meant minimizing

obvious Christological connections. To be sure, John did not hesitate to make the connection that the wood was a type of the cross and Isaac a type of Christ. John, however, plainly states his belief that that central intent of sacred scripture was "to reveal to us the good man's virtue."[3]

For John, even theological observations were couched in terms of some type of practical relevance for his flock. The foreshadowing of the crucifixion, for example, was useful only insomuch as it established Abraham's Christian credentials. These Christian credentials in turn validated John's use of Abraham as a model that his flock should emulate. The reward for such emulation was a place in paradise and in the bosom of the original practitioner of virtue. The aforementioned parable of Lazarus and the rich man (to which Chrysostom devoted seven homilies), the hospitality at Mamre, and Matthew's presentation of Christ's teaching on the universal final judgment were central to John's soteriological understanding of Abraham. Indeed, for John, the presence of Abraham in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, rather than another figure of the Old Testament, was an indication of the virtue the patriarch practiced.

John presented the hospitality at Mamre as a lived account of Christ's description of the final judgment. In Chrysostom's homiletical presentation, the three visitors whom Abraham encountered were not a type of the triune God but rather Christ accompanied by two angels. There was not much subtlety in John's homilies, and his flock should have had little difficulty apprehending the contemporary implications of Abraham's virtue. If they emulated Abraham they too had the opportunity to entertain Christ in their homes, and if they failed to do so then the fate of the rich man in the flames of anguish was their recompense.

4. A Father of the Christians

For Chrysostom, Abraham was useful in his ongoing diatribe against Judaism and its competing claims to the Old Testament narrative. Chrysostom grudgingly acknowledged that Jews were of the "holy root" and at one time had a "genuine relationship" with Abraham but nevertheless challenged their current relationship to the patriarch. In the foregoing we saw that, for Chrysostom, the governing criterion for kinship was neither circumcision nor even baptism but rather the practice of virtue. Chrysostom set out to present both the Jews of scripture and their contemporaneous descendants as lacking in such Abrahamic virtue. For John, the Jewish rejection of the gospel

3. *In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.428. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 3 vols., Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 3:14.

demonstrated such a deficit in virtue that it resulted in the estrangement of the Jewish people from both their patriarch and their God.

Chrysostom did not mince words with regard to the separation of Jews from their Abrahamic lineage. John told his flock that the Jews were "cast out" and "separated" from Abraham because they were "unworthy" of him. John looked to Paul in support of the view that Jews were estranged from Abraham, but in characteristic fashion he amplified and intensified Pauline language to suit his sophistic style of diatribe. Despite the seeming finality of Chrysostom's statements, he did hold out the opportunity of reestablishment of the Jewish Abrahamic relationship should the Jewish people demonstrate their virtue through acceptance of the gospel. Chrysostom cautioned his flock not to place their hope of salvation in their Christian baptism and thus fall into the same trap as the Jews who put their trust in circumcision and their biological relationship. The essence of Abrahamic lineage was contained in the practice of a particular, Christian virtue, and that virtue secured a place of salvation in the bosom of Abraham. Thus, Chrysostom's Old Testament trajectory, and corresponding view of Judaism, begins and ends with Abraham. The arc begins with the Abrahamic covenant and the promise God made to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, and it ends with the salvation of those who emulate his virtue and gain their eternal repose in his metaphorical bosom.

As with Paul and subsequent generations of Christian theologians, John saw Christ as the thread that held these two endpoints together. For John, this Christian message within the Old Testament was so clear that he described Abraham's tent as a forerunner of the Christian church community. The experience of Israel in general and the Exodus and Sinai events in particular were absorbed within Chrysostom's overarching interpretation of the Old Testament narrative. The Abrahamic promise was thus greater than any other event in the history of Israel, and the Christian gospel represented the fulfillment of that message. John believed that Abraham recognized this fulfillment when he offered tithes to Melchizedek. For John, Abraham's submission to Melchizedek was a clear indication of the inferiority of the Sinai covenant in comparison to the future new covenant.

John used a hypothetical debate with both scriptural and contemporaneous Jews to convey this message of Christian superiority to his flock. Diatribe was a stock component of sophistic rhetoric, which he used to counter Jewish claims that were substantive on a number of levels. John's repeated refrain of "You, O Jew" and the homiletical space he afforded such a rebuttal is an indication of the seriousness with which he regarded Jewish claims to Abrahamic lineage and the need to counter those claims. John's emphasis on circumcision and biological

relationship might not shed definitive light on what Jews thought at the time, but it does indicate what Chrysostom felt was of key importance and what required a proper response within his homiletical discourse. The mildness of Chrysostom's invective (in comparison to that offered in his *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*) militates against seeing him engaged in a bitter pastoral dispute with Judaism in this regard. In analyzing John's use of Abraham, one discerns Chrysostom more inclined toward defending the emulation of Abraham's virtue, which he considers the marker of Christian relationship to the patriarch.

5. *De beato Abraham* as a Homily of John Chrysostom

It is my belief that the homily *De beato Abraham*, categorized by the manuscript tradition and some compilers of Chrysostom's works as authentic and by others as either dubious or spurious, is an authentic homily of John Chrysostom. The homily demonstrates all of the encomiastic elements present in Chrysostom's treatment of the patriarch and presents the patriarch in a manner that is entirely consistent with Chrysostom's other homiletical references. These parallels are not an adaptation of one or two homilies but rather follow Chrysostom's view of Abraham from a broad cross-section of his works. Some of these parallels have their direct cognates in other Chrysostomic references while others make use of aspects of John's rhetorical form, such as the use of plants as a rhetorical device or reference to sailing and farming metaphors. These parallels, while quite similar, do not bear the mark of an intentional forgery but rather indicate a consistent homiletic usage fully according with a homilist who borrows from his own discourse at the moment of the sermon—something for which Chrysostom is well known. Thus in *De beato Abraham*, Sarah is the one who vocalizes her despair at the loss of her beloved son, and in a Chrysostomic homily it is Abraham.

Some of the references to Abraham, while natural scriptural conclusions, nevertheless bear the mark of Chrysostom's particular rhetorical style. The lament of a mother that she would rather die than see her child suffer and the focus on parenting are examples of common Chrysostomic themes that are interwoven into the fabric of the sermon in a way that does not demonstrate outright plagiarism but rather conveys the general sense of Chrysostom's homiletical style.

Recent scholarship has shown that the early compilers of Chrysostom's homilies were not perfect in their assessment of the manuscripts they collated.[4] The principal argument against the authenticity of *De beato Abraham* is that the

homily lacks the feel of Chrysostom. I believe that this analysis has confirmed that this is not the case, that the style and tenor of the homily are completely consistent with John Chrysostom's other works, and that there is no serious reason to overturn the manuscript tradition that assigns authorship to the Antiochene homilist.

6. Significance of the Methodology

While I intended in this present study to show how a major father of the church viewed a single figure from the Old Testament, the methodology employed provided us with much broader insights. One can argue that these broader insights are, ironically, a result of the *absence* of a series of homilies on Abraham in the homiletical corpus of John Chrysostom. Since Chrysostom never offered a set of defined sermons on the patriarch, there was no static target on which a researcher could focus his or her attention. The project therefore demanded an examination of Chrysostom's entire corpus in order to gain a complete understanding of John's presentation and associated pastoral and theological application of the patriarch. While such an examination presents a daunting task, contemporary research tools such as the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* made a project of this nature feasible. A consistent, thematically based image of Abraham did indeed emerge from the culling of the data.

The foregoing shows that Chrysostom had developed a sophistic encomium to Abraham in his mind and yet he never committed this encomium to a single homily or series of homilies but rather offered it to his congregation in small doses and in various settings, all the while maintaining a coherent and consistent message. A casual perusal of the footnotes illustrates the nature of this consistency and the eclectic manner in which Chrysostom presented Abraham to his congregation. The reader will notice that the Abrahamic references often jump between various sermons when any particular theme is discussed.

4. Paul Harkins demonstrated that Chrysostom's ninth homily *On the Incomprehensibility of God*, for example, was indeed authentic. John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, trans. Paul W. Harkins, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984). Margaret Schatkin similarly affirmed the authenticity of the *Discourse on the Blessed Babylas*. John Chrysostom, *Apologist: Discourse on Blessed Babylas and against the Greeks and Demonstration against the Pagans That Christ Is God*, trans. Margaret A. Schatkin and Paul W. Harkins, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1985). Another example is David Hunter's affirmation of the authenticity of *Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life*, which was also previously questioned. John Chrysostom, *A Comparison between a King and a Monk. Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life: Two Treatises*, trans. David G. Hunter, vol. 13, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1988).

Chrysostom's discussion of Abraham as a model parent, for example, includes references from ten different homilies. The same is true for Abraham as a model of philanthropy. Chrysostom's presentation of Abraham was consistent and coherent and yet eminently diverse. Chrysostom never preached a single, self-contained panegyric homily on Abraham as a model of philanthropy, but one nevertheless emerges from the body of his works. Indeed, a variety of less-obvious themes, such as Abraham as a model monastic, emerged as a result of this study and hopefully will be of value to scholars in the years to come. Chrysostom could have easily presented any of the themes discussed herein as a self-contained homily, but his rhetorical style did not follow such a linear path for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the lectionary to which he was most likely bound.

The more general significance of the methodology I have employed in this study is that it illustrates the need for a broader and less systematic understanding of patristic thought. To be more precise, we must not impose system where system is absent, but should remain open to the detection of both consistencies and inconsistencies in the evidence of what the church fathers thought. This is especially true of John Chrysostom, who could write on a topic such as virginity but whose view of virginity and monasticism was much more complex than a reading of *De virginitate* will reveal. The contemporary tools at our disposal help facilitate a process that previously would have presented daunting challenges. The present study illustrates that we are now able to overcome these challenges. Indeed, George Dragas is somewhat of a pioneer in this type of research in that he conducted a similar type of analysis on the works of Athanasius of Alexandria in the 1970s using computer methods that were, to say the least, primitive compared to those at our disposal today.

To be sure, I do not mean to suggest that the methodology applied here is either novel or unique. Margaret Mitchell's recent and extensive examination of Paul in the works of John Chrysostom and Hagit Amirav's study of John's view of Noah and the flood are certainly representative of this approach, albeit with the benefit of focused homilies on their respective topics. The methodology I have employed in this investigation and the related results, however, reinforce the importance and significance associated with the examination of a single topic throughout the entire works of a specific church father. Some of the pastoral and theological themes presented in the present exploration are prime candidates for such a study, examples of which include parenthood, sacrifice, covenant, and philanthropy. Such scholarly investigations of Chrysostom's works, in my opinion, can do nothing less than help better inform our understanding of this most important church father of the Christian East.

Appendix A

English Translation of *De beato Abraham*[1]

I. [737] Do you see the vigorous gray hair and the ripe old age? Do you see the noble athlete take a battle stance toward nature and heart? Do you see a man in extreme old age hard as steel? While the tone of his flesh has become slack, the tone of his faith has become muscular—for such are the achievements of the Church since the weakness of the body does not wipe away the eagerness of faith—moreover, the Church rejoices in this sober old age and winged faith which is an adornment for the Church. The old man is useless for external things and, because he is weak, he enjoys the excuse of not being useful for necessary things. By this I mean that the old man is not able to prepare himself for battle, nor able to mount a horse, nor throw a spear, nor brandish the shield, nor endure the heat of the sun, nor endure a long journey, nor endure severe hunger, nor swelling crowds but rather sits in a peaceful place having old age as his excuse.

This observation could also be made concerning boats. An old man is not able to be seated upon the tiller, nor traverse the sea, nor handle the oar for rowing, nor hang a sail, nor battle the opposing winds, nor endure the fierceness of the cold, nor be able to do any such thing, but rather sits in the vessel having old age as an excuse. One can see that this is also the case with farmers for neither is he able to drag the plow, nor cut through the furrow, nor break horses, nor have the strength to deal with oxen, nor battle the heat of the sun, nor the swelling of the heat, nor the weight of the spade, nor any other thing that is useful for the earth—but he sits in the house, having old age as his advocate.

However, this is not so in matters of the Church, for when someone living a virtuous life grows old they become more useful—not because of the firmness of their flesh but rather because they stretch forth in the pursuit of faith. Such was the case with Abraham who was slack with respect to the strength of the flesh but was well toned and strong in terms of the strength of faith. He was an old man but in extreme old age; he battled against nature and won a great trophy. He was an old man but was stronger than iron and steel. It was not in youth that this was achieved but rather it was when youth had passed that

1. *PG* 50.737–46.

he raised the trophy of victory. He was in extreme old age but his old age did not become an impediment. God, therefore, knowing his strength, manifested himself to him and said, "Go forth from your country and from your kindred and from your father's house to the land that I will show you." Abraham obeyed the word and though he was and would be an old man and slack [738] in body he did not say to himself, "Where am I traveling in such extreme old age and why am I forsaking my father's house and the land in which I was born? Wherein there is an abundance of wealth and the fame of ancestors; wherein there are sumptuous possessions and the wealth of friends." While on the one hand he grieved for the present life, on the other hand he did not disobey. He loved his homeland and forsaking it caused anxiety, but as a lover of God he was persuaded and obeyed. It was a wonder that God never told him to which place he was going, but the unknown name of the place to which he was going trained him in the exercise of free will. For if God had said to him, "I will lead you to the land of milk and honey" then Abraham would not be found obeying the voice of God but rather preferring earthly things. Therefore, Abraham left not knowing where he was going. Do you see old age magnified by achievements? For as I said before, such are our affairs: the weakness of old age does not destroy these things and time does not extinguish them—for old age is in bodies and agelessness is in the soul. Abraham left taking nothing but still dwelling in tents. He was not disbelieving nor did he resist for he considered the voice of the calling to be a trustworthy pledge. He was childless and sterile and Sarah had not yet received the annunciation concerning the son Isaac. But what nature refuses, grace freely gives. He received the reward of trustworthy obedience but did not know this, for if he had known he would not have been trustworthy.

In order that you may learn that he did not obey because of this (i.e., to receive a reward) see how he did not disobey when he was ordered to kill but throws aside nature and embraces the love of God, he tramples upon emotions and does not ignore the one calling. Therefore, God says to him, "Abraham, Abraham." And he said, "Here I am." And he said, "Take your beloved son Isaac, whom you love, and offer him as a whole burnt offering on one of the mountains, whichever I tell you" (Gen. 22:2). He did not show him the mountain but rather sent him out to an undefined mountain in order to increase his despair. Nevertheless, none of this troubled Abraham but increasingly it would disturb him. However, he suffered the things of man but did not suffer the effects of sin—he was tempest tossed on the one hand as a father but not drowning; his insides were aflame but faith was victorious. So you will not say

that Abraham did not suffer, consider how he was set on fire by the whirlwind of emotions and then see his philosophy.

He did not tell Sarah but was afraid lest he in any way hinder the mystery before it was completed. For if he told her she would be likely to restrain him and say, "Where are you taking your son whom I received against all hope, whom I received according to the promise, whom I received in return for the hospitality, whom God gave to me as a gift in extreme old age? Where are you leading him? Where are you taking him? Nothing is [739] revealed to you! For how has God revealed to you that he seeks the son who he gave and for whom I hoped? He gave him to me and he takes him? If he gave him to me just to take him, it would have been better if he didn't give him to me at all. For it is less pain to not have had him than to take him and destroy him." Consider Sarah, inflamed with anger and burning with fire and carried away by her nature—her womb and insides twisted and tied in knots. Women are sympathetic about things such as this—being so much more gentle and sympathetic, she would have likely imposed upon Abraham and thus impeded the sacrifice and left the mystery undone. For what could have dragged Sarah away from her son? For she could not bear to see the son she had hoped for, who was given to her in old age, slaughtered at the hands of the father who would perform the murder of the child. Not only would she be incapable of bearing such a thing, but moreover, Sarah would have waged war on Abraham. In war it is necessary that they pursue in order to ambush but she pursues to hinder the mystery. Abraham, therefore, did not tell Sarah so there would be no dispute, so that the dispute would not turn into a battle, so that the battle would not become a division over the son, so that the division over the son would not cause a delay in the annunciation, ambushing the deed, so that the deed not be ambushed and the mystery remain unaccomplished.

II. But the philosopher Abraham—the athlete struggling against nature for the prize, sparring with his insides, and arming himself against nature—did not disobey the command of God but heard the order and immediately took his son. With pleasure I dwell upon these words, "Take your beloved son Isaac, whom you love, and offer him to me as a whole burnt offering on one of the mountains, whichever I tell you" (Gen. 22:2). And Abraham departed taking Isaac, the donkey, and the two servants. Then, having arrived at a certain place, he tells the servants. "You stay here," he commands them, "but the young lad and I will go on ahead and after we have worshiped we will come back to you" (Gen. 22:5). Abraham prophesized unknowingly—the divine grace working together with him. Go up to slay your son and you say, "We will return"? As he

seeks to deceive the servants he becomes a prophet. He placed the wood upon Isaac's shoulders, taking the fire and the knife, and went up the mountain.

And what did Isaac say to his father? "Father." And he, "What is it, child?" And he said, "Behold the fire and the wood—where is the sheep for the whole burnt offering?" And he to him, "God himself will see to a sheep as a whole burnt offering, child" (Gen. 22:7-8). Behold, a second prophecy! I do not conceal nor disregard the words, nor treat what came to pass in a cursory fashion. Consider that these names will be stripped bare of reality. In this way he calls this person "father" and in turn that one "son." On the one hand they perceive the names on the other hand they were destined to be stripped bare. [740] For consider what Abraham suffered being called "father" by Isaac who would be slaughtered. How did his knees not shatter into pieces? How did his limbs not break? How did his mind not suffer these things he heard from his son, Isaac? Nevertheless, he carried Isaac, bound him, and took the knife in his right hand in order to slaughter his son. Oh this right hand, being raised against the son! I am unable to express with words these things that took place. How did the hand not become numb? How did the sword not fall from his hand? How did he not completely dissolve and break into pieces? How did he have the strength to stand and see Isaac bound? How did he not suddenly remain as one dead? How did his sinews support him? And how did his resolve endure? I am unable to express with words this thing that took place. Whoever is a father or a mother, come forward, lend a helping hand, and help me find the words—for I am weak with such things, but you can help me.

Many times there is someone with five or six sons and daughters and whenever one of them becomes sick, the father paces about the bed kissing the eyes and embracing the hands of the child. He reckons the day as night and the light as darkness—the time of day is unchanging because the bitterness of the pain makes him unable to find pleasure in them. Soft beds have been made up and physicians are sitting about—many are the bodyguards for one so unfortunate. Due to all of this, the father completely wastes away. Even though he has an abundance of money, it is an abomination to him. Even though he has countless worries, he pursues them all. He is drunk, unable to become sober because of the pain. His entire world is an incurable evil. Likewise, the mother runs about feverishly, torn in two and completely inflamed with anger and searching for the strength to share in the pain, or rather to take it entirely upon herself in order to relieve her afflicted child from the sickness. For her the present life is nothing, nor the future, but for her it is more precious to take the illness of her child upon herself. I do not know how to describe such suffering.

Now consider Abraham suffering these things but philosophizing and being obedient to the command. He tramples upon nature and the commandment of compassion becomes much more powerful. However, as stated before, he suffered these things as a man but he philosophized as a lover of God. And he was to see the martyr Isaac living and not living, dead and not dead. Inasmuch, on the one hand, he died because of the offering of the father, on the other hand, he did not die due to the benevolence of God—for he was a type and image of the Master. The type was useful and anticipates the truth. Then Isaac is bound but not slaughtered, for a voice of mercy and full of benevolence came from above and it pours over the patriarch, pressing completely upon him who is ready for the slaughter and says, "Abraham, Abraham do not place your hand upon the young servant" (Gen. 22:11-12). Why not, "upon the child" instead of "upon the young servant?" Why degrade him so?—for he was a man. But there was need of the Son, of the true, only-begotten Son who was sent to us from the Father, not a young servant. "Do not place your hand upon the young servant." You were sufficient for the type, wait for the truth.

[741] And Abraham prophesies on the one hand deceiving the servants but you see on the other hand that he was in fact proclaiming the truth. For what does he say? "Stay here with the donkey, but I and the young servant will go up there and we will worship and return to you." He said this not understanding but rather as it turned out; or rather, just exactly as he thought. He left the servants behind so that they would not overpower him by force, waging war against God. What kind of calamity would the elder have undergone when the servants, believing him to be suffering from the debilities of old age, would have tried to prevent him from setting the sacrifice in motion, saying, "O Master, what are you doing? Are you going to sacrifice the promised one, the one given to you by God, the one who will care for you in old age, the heir who will succeed you, the son of Sarah? Think about what you are doing! Take counsel with your wife, your companion, the one who endured the pains of childbirth! Sacrifice us first rather than your son!"

But the wise elder did not take his servants to hinder him but rather makes the victim carry the wood so that he may possess the type of the Savior carrying the cross. But the child, carrying the wood and groaning, moves the father's heart, but this did not drive out his longing for God. For what did he say? "Father." But consider the nature of the voice that says, "Father." When we are about to sacrifice a lamb or any other animal we see it bleating with a gentle voice, neighing at us, and we show mercy, we pity the inarticulate animal producing the sound. Consider, therefore, what would happen if the sheep

conversed with a man who was weak. "Father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the whole burnt offering?" But the lamb was the one speaking to the conscience of the father provoking the priest to compassion. For he had not learned from Christ who said, "The one who loves father or mother or son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). But he imitated the Father about whom it is spoken, "Who certainly did not spare his own Son, but gave him on behalf of us" (Rom. 8:32). Where is the sheep? The child understood. What, therefore, did the father say? "God, himself, will see to a sheep as a whole burnt offering, child"—not a servant but a son; this one only begotten and that one God, the only begotten; this one with the wood upon his shoulders and Christ with the cross upon his shoulders; Isaac did not sin and was about to be slaughtered, Christ did not sin and he was to be crucified; this one slaughtered and yet not slaughtered, and the only begotten Son of God was slaughtered and not slaughtered, died and yet did not die. For as much, on the one hand, according to free will, he died but just as much, on the other hand, according to the fulfillment of things, he did not die. The Son of God, however, died in the flesh but the divinity remained unaffected.

III. For whenever God orchestrates some future, great thing among humans, he traces its shadow in advance so that when the truth occurs they might not distrust it—so that they will not disbelieve the truth having anticipated the image. I will give you an example: The All Holy Virgin was destined to give birth. How can a virgin give birth against the laws of nature? Thus the one to be born would be contrary to nature. Who, from time immemorial has ever seen a virgin give birth? God, therefore, anticipates this. [742] In order that the Jews not fall into profound disbelief, he foreshadows the truth in Sarah so that when they question how the Virgin gave birth, they would remember and say, "How did Sarah give birth?"

Greater than this is the question concerning how the virgin earth gave birth. There was no spade or farmer present in the land; no rain had fallen nor had any plants sprouted; no furrow had been cleared and the land was barren, having received no seed or even a drop of rain to gladden it. Tell me then, how the earth, being virgin, brought forth innumerable species of plants? You do not know how to explain how these things came to pass but simply say, "God has willed it." It is the same in the case of the Virgin. Therefore, since you are confused, learn not to busy yourself whenever God is at work. Do not inquire about nature when the craftsman of nature is at work. Do not be inquisitive! He said, "Let the earth bear fruit" (Gen. 1:11), and immediately the Word penetrated into the recesses of the earth and roused in it the pains of birth—and the virgin gave birth. The Word, the one who proceeds, was one

and yet innumerable species of plants sprouted forth and the earth assumed its proper adornment through the Word. And what a spectacle as the earth swelled with the birds, the animals living in the sea and on dry land, the meadows, the flowers, the trees, the vine, the olive tree, the innumerable species of trees—the unripe, the ripe, those on the plains, those by the sea, by the lakes, by the rivers, by the streams, and on the mountains. The Word, the one who works, was one and the earth received its proper beauty.

Explain to me, O Jew, how this came to be! But you cannot. You see how the error overturns itself. Pay attention closely. For as I said, when God is about to perform some deed that seems unbelievable to humans, he puts forth the type and the shadow in advance in order that when the truth comes suddenly they are not thrown into disbelief. It was necessary for the Son of God to descend and baptize the human race, drown the old man who wanted to revive sin, restore the blessing, wipe out the curse, bestow grace, and make humans into angels. It was necessary to take an adulterer and make him a son—and this is precisely what he did. He took a being not worthy of the earth and made him worthy of heaven. This wonder, in which a natural element both drowns and justifies the same man, wipes out sin and pours out faith, was great and bewildering to many. Therefore, an example is necessary in order that the Jews not say, "These are Christian myths! How can this water drown someone and also give life? Water is one element, how is it able to have two operations?" How, then, will God manage to put to shame the impudence of the Jews?

The sons of Israel were afflicted in Egypt in their labors—in the making of bricks and other work. And they shouted out, crying and saying, "Who will deliver us from bondage in Egypt? We are dying! We are being consumed in painful labor!" What then? God heard them and sent Moses, arming him with signs and miracles. Moses came and brought punishment to Pharaoh—he led an army of dreadful locusts, he called forth the rains and they came, he turned the water into blood, he caused boils to break out on [743] the people and the cattle. Then, when after these blows Pharaoh still did not yield, God brought about the death of the firstborn. Then, for the sake of brevity (otherwise, unless we abridge the story we will go on and on and fail to fulfill our promise), they came out of the land of Egypt and arrived at the sea. Pharaoh encamped behind them with a multitude of chariots and horses. Israel was frightened when they saw the army in array. But they came to the very edge of the sea and God said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me?" (Exod. 14:15). However, Moses had not said a word. But God said, "I am God. I hear not only what comes forth from lips but also that which is in the heart," in order that you learn that prayer is not in the crying out but in the thought. "Why do you cry out to

me?" His lips did not say anything but his heart was crying out. For prayer is sought from a good mind, not strong shouting. "Why do you cry out to me? Stretch out the staff in your hand over the water and you and all of Israel shall pass through." Moses stretched out the staff in his hand and struck the water and the wild rush of water forgot its nature and dried up. For this is the way an element behaves when God performs a sign, it forgets its proper nature and its operation is harnessed. The sea, just like a devoted female slave, saw the servant of its Master, heard and obeyed. It obeyed, however, not for the sake of the dried wood of the staff but for the sake of the one that was to be crucified on the wood. The sea saw the image, immediately comprehended the truth, and receded. "Pass through," he said, "you and all the people of Israel." Then he passed through and all of Israel with him. But the Egyptians also followed with Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horses in close pursuit. Then, when the sons of Israel passed through, the water came suddenly and buried the Egyptians.

Therefore, tell me, O Jew, how water in the case of baptism has two operations, in one way it drowns someone but in another it gives him life? Tell me how that sea, being one in nature, gave life to some and death to others? How did it drown some but become a road—indeed, out of wild, rushing water—to others? And how was it that the sea in one way respected the servants of God but in another imitated the manner of barbarians? Explain this to me, O Jew, you who disbelieves in the cross, how the same water drowned some but saved others? The water was one, the sea was one, and yet neither did it wet the foot of these people nor did it leave a trace of a footprint from the others. The sea took hold of all of them, buried them under the water, and made a common grave for the entire Egyptian army. Tell me therefore how this came to be. Do you see how the shadow came first in order that the truth might be believed? How were these things shadow but those things truth? Do you see, as I said before, that whenever God intends to orchestrate a strange deed, he first prefigures and foreshadows it so that when the truth is manifested it might be acceptable? For it is necessary that the image be inferior to the truth, for if it were perfect it would not be shadow but truth. The shadow preceded and then the colorful truth came and clearly showed the image. Those things were types and these things are reality [744] as in the case of sheep.

The universe was destined to be liberated by the blood of Christ and set free from the curse. Since once again this great miracle was unbelievable to the hard-hearted souls of the Jews, God orchestrated and foreshadowed it beforehand through the sheep. This was done so that the sons of Israel would not be destroyed together with the firstborn of the Egyptians who were to perish. "What should we do," Moses said, "lest the destroyer angel also destroys

the sons of Israel together with the Egyptian firstborn? What should we do?" God said to them, "Order the sons of Israel to take a blameless, one-year-old, male lamb each according to their family." "And, if they are not wealthy," he said, "a neighbor will summon a neighbor, and a family will summon a family, thus having taken the lamb, sacrifice a blameless, one-year-old, male lamb according to the families and according to the houses of the fathers. Eat the meat, roasted by fire, leaving not even one piece and anoint your lintels with its blood." "Eat it," he says, "with your loins girded and with sandals on your feet as would someone traveling and keep your lamps burning" (Exod. 12:3ff.). Why?—because evening was falling. And why eat as travelers? I will tell you—because of the type and the truth. Many times Pharaoh was struck with fear and yet he did not release them. Moses said to them, "He is struck with fear today and you will be released." Yet before he had been struck with fear and still did not release them. Nine times he was struck with fear and did not release them. But on the tenth time he would indeed release them. "Take the dress of travelers," he tells them, "for after you have eaten you will not have one thing in common with the Egyptians. Therefore, take the blameless, one-year-old, male lamb and sacrifice it and anoint your lintels with its blood so that when the angel comes he will spare you on account of the type of the blood, even if he does not spare the others." This came to pass not because of the angel but through the blood that saves me. For was not the angel able to distinguish between the Egyptians and the Jews when they were standing side by side? If the angel knew who the firstborn was, did he not have the power to discern which one was Egyptian and which one was Hebrew?

When he reproaches you saying, "You trust in blood?" Say to him, "And you do too! Are you not ashamed O shameless one? Are you saved by the blood of the lamb and I am not saved by the blood of the Master?" Therefore, the Jew, while eating, hastens to be saved from Egypt. The Christian, while eating, hastens to be delivered from the world. And thus, Paul addresses you saying, "Clothe yourself with the breastplate of righteousness, tie your feet with sandals in preparation for the Gospel of Peace" (Eph. 6:14-15)—there sandals and here sandals, there a staff and here a breastplate, Moses speaks of travelers and Paul speaks of soldiers, they traveled from earth to earth as travelers while I journey from earth to heaven as a soldier. Why as a soldier? Because my aerial journey is infested with robbers and I encounter demons. Because of this I have naked confidence. Because of this I have the breastplate of righteousness. [745] Because of this I have the belt of truth—for I am not only a traveler but I am also a soldier. "Straight and narrow is the road to life" (Matt. 7:14). Therefore, see how Paul deals with the spiritual and Moses uses the material. Therefore

my beloved, [746] let us endeavor to imitate Abraham in order that we may be received into his bosom through the grace and philanthropy of our Lord Jesus Christ to whom belongs the glory and the power now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Appendix B

Comparison of *De beato Abraham* to Chrysostomic Texts

Ref.	*De beato Abraham* Reference	Chrysostomic Reference
1	Do you see the vigorous gray hair [πολιᾷ] and the ripe old age? Do you see the noble athlete take a battle stance toward nature and heart? Do you see a man in extreme old age hard as steel?	But think now what a thing it would be to see a presbyter, the moving picture of Abraham, gray-headed [πολιὸν], girded up, digging and working with his own hands? What more pleasant than such a field!
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.737.3–6.	*In Acta apostolorum* 18, *PG* 60.147 (*NPNF1* 11.118).
2	While the tone of his flesh has become slack, the tone of his faith has become muscular—for such are the achievements of the Church since the weakness of the body does not wipe away the eagerness of faith.	It is said that faith is patient, imitate the blessed Abraham, who was past the prime of age and yet became as a ripe fruit.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.737.7–10.	*Sermo cum iret in exsilium*, *PG* 52.436.
3	An old man is not able to be seated upon the tiller, nor traverse the sea, nor handle the oar for rowing, nor hang a sail, nor battle the opposing winds, nor endure the fierceness of the cold, nor be able to do any such thing, but rather sits in the vessel having old age as an excuse.	Do not then only admire this righteous man, but also imitate him, and when you see him amid so great uproar and surge of waves sailing as in a calm, take thou in hand in like way the helm of obedience and fortitude.

	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.737.22–27.	*In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 3, *PG* 61.415. (*NPNF1* 12.292).
4	One can see that this is also the case with farmers for neither is he able to drag the plow, nor cut through the furrow, nor break horses, nor have the strength to deal with oxen, nor battle the heat of the sun, nor the swelling of the heat, nor the weight of the spade, nor any other thing that is useful for the earth—but he sits in the house, having old age as his advocate.	Spring is welcome to mariners, spring is also welcome to farmers. . . . To farmers, you see, spring is welcome because it is then that they see the ground wreathed in flowers, and the growth of plants enfolding it with a kind of mantle.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.737.27–27.	*In Genesim (sermones 1-9)* 1, *PG* 54.581. Hill, *Eight Sermons on the Book of Genesis*, 21.
5	He was an old man but in extreme old age; he battled against nature and won a great trophy.	The blessed Abraham lifted up the great prize when he had reached old age; for then he destroyed the tyranny of nature.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.737.40–41.	*Messis quidem multa*, *PG* 63.517.
6	He was an old man but was stronger than iron and steel [ἀδάμαντος στεῤῥότερος].	You saw yesterday, beloved, the courage of the patriarch; you saw a soul stronger than steel [ἀδάμαντος στεῤῥοτέραν].
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.737.41–42.	*In Genesim* 48, *PG* 53.434.
7	Do you see old age magnified by achievements [κατορθώμασι]?	Abraham, as I said above, along with his other virtuous deeds [κατορθωμάτων] also accomplished this splendid action.

	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.738.17.	*Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae*, *PG* 47.384. Hunter, *Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life*, 173.
8	In order that you may learn that he did not obey because of this (i.e., to receive a reward) see how he did not disobey when he was ordered to kill but throws aside nature and embraces the love of God, he tramples upon emotions and does not ignore the one calling.	Like a dutiful servant he set aside every human consideration and had one single concern, to put into effect the command; as though transcending human nature and putting all compassion and fatherly affection second to God's commands, he hastened to their discharge.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.738.29–33.	*In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.430. Hill, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:17.
9	His insides were aflame but faith was victorious. So you will not say that Abraham did not suffer, consider how he was set on fire by the whirlwind of emotions and then see his philosophy.	Whereas his hand carried a visible fire, the fire within scorched his mind and wasted his thoughts, persuading him that he would overcome by his love of God and leading him to reason.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.738.45–48.	*In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.430. Hill, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:18.
10	He did not tell Sarah but was afraid lest he in any way hinder the mystery before it was completed. For if he told her she would be likely to restrain him . . .	Even Abraham, who had an admirable wife, when he was about to offer up his son, concealed it from her. . . . But intent upon offering up a pure victim, he would not defile it with tears, or with any opposition.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.738.48–50.	*In epistulam i ad Timotheum* 14, *PG* 62.578 (*NPNF1* 13.458).
11	Where are you taking your son whom I received against all	What does this mean? He who granted me offspring contrary to

	hope, whom I received according to the promise, whom I received in return for the hospitality, whom God gave to me as a gift in extreme old age? Where are you leading him? Where are you taking him? Nothing is revealed to you! For how has God revealed to you that he seeks the son who he gave and for whom I hoped? He gave him to me and he takes him?	all expectation, he who in his characteristic love brought to life the infertile womb of Sarah, now after the child's suckling and growing and finally coming of age bids me have him put to death and sacrificed as a burnt offering; he who a little before said, "Your descendants will be called after him,' now gives a contrary command."
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.738.50–739.3.	*In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.429. Hill, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:16.
12	And he to him, "God, himself, will see to a sheep as a whole burnt offering, child." Behold, a second prophecy!	"My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering." In this he uttered a prophecy that God would provide Himself a burnt offering in His Son, and it also came true at the time.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.739.54–55.	*In epistulam i ad Timotheum* 14, *PG* 62.578 (*NPNF1* 13.458).
13	For consider what Abraham suffered being called "father" by Isaac who would be slaughtered. How did his knees not shatter into pieces? How did his limbs not break? How did his mind not suffer these things he heard from his son, Isaac?	Let us not idly pass by these words, dearly beloved, but wonder how his soul did not part company with his body, how he managed to bind him with his own hands and place on the faggots his beloved, his graceful, his only begotten son.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.739.54–55.	*In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.431. Hill, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:19.
14	Oh this right hand [Ὢ τῆς δεξιᾶς ἐκείνης], being drawn	Oh blessed right hand [Ὢ δεξιᾶς μακαρίας], of what a

	against the son! I am unable to express with words these things that took place.	knife was it accounted worthy? . . . For I know not what to say, so awful was that mystery.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.740.8–10.	*In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 3, *PG* 61.414 (*NPNF1* 12.292).
15	How did the hand not become numb? How did the sword not fall from his hand? How did he not completely dissolve and break into pieces? How did he have the strength to stand and see Isaac bound? How did he not suddenly remain as one dead? How did his sinews support him?	How was his hand able to hold the fire and the sword? . . . Consider, I ask you, the torture in this for the good man: how he put up with hearing the words, how he had the strength to reply to his son, how he did not fall apart, how he managed to conceal the truth and not reveal to his son what was about to happen.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.740.10–14.	*In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.430–31. Hill, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:18–19.
16	Likewise, the mother runs about feverishly, torn in two and completely inflamed with anger and searching for the strength to share in the pain, or rather to take it entirely upon herself in order to relieve her afflicted child from the sickness. For her the present life is nothing, nor the future, but for her it is more precious to take the illness of her child upon herself.	A mother, when she beholds her son in a fever, while she witnesses his sufferings from choking and inflammation, frequently bewails him, and says to him, “O my son, would that I could sustain thy fever, and draw off its flame upon myself.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.740.31–37.	*Homiliæ de statuis* 13, *PG* 49.142 (*NPNF1* 9.430).
17	He tramples upon nature and the commandment of compassion becomes much more powerful.	[Was not] nature overcome and devotion triumphant? [Were not] feelings trampled on and

	However, as stated before, he suffered these things as a man but he philosophized as a lover of God [φιλόθεος].	pious deeds prevailing? The father laid low and the lover of God crowned? Do you not see in one person lover of his child and lover of God? [φιλόθεον].
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.740.31–37.	*Vidi dominum* 6, *SC* 277.4.2. Hill, *Old Testament Homilies*, 2:84.
18	But the wise elder did not take his servants to hinder him but rather makes the victim carry the wood so that he may possess the type of the Savior carrying the cross.	We know the son was offered in sacrifice, and we gather something else contained in the thought by mention of the son, namely, the Cross.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.741.44–48.	*Expositiones in Psalmos* 47, *PG* 55.209. Hill, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:299.
19	[Isaac was] slaughtered and yet not slaughtered. For as much, on the one hand, according to free will, he died but just as much, on the other hand, according to the fulfillment of things, he did not die.	[Abraham] slaughtered the child; for he slaughtered, if not in deed but in thought, and if not in completion but in intent.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.741.44–48.	*Messis quidem multa*, *PG* 63.517.
20	For it is necessary that the image be inferior to the truth for if it were perfect it would not be shadow but truth. The shadow preceded and then the colorful truth came and clearly showed the image. Those things were types and these things are reality as in the case of sheep.	You see, it was necessary that the truth be sketched out ahead of time in shadow. Notice, I ask you, dearly beloved, how everything was prefigured in shadow. . . . Up to this point there is shadow, but now the truth of things is shown to be more excellent.

	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.743.55–744.1.	*In Genesim* 47, *PG* 54.432. Hill, *Homilies on Genesis*, 3:22.
21	Moses speaks of travelers and Paul speaks of soldiers, they traveled from earth to earth as travelers while I journey from earth to heaven as a soldier.	We, on the other hand, are not called to leave one country for another, but to leave earth for heaven.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.744.50–53.	*In Genesim* 31, *PG* 53.291. Hill, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:252.
22	Therefore my beloved, let us endeavor to imitate Abraham in order that we may be received into his bosom.	Let us, therefore, I beseech you, take care to follow in the footsteps of this patriarch by practicing virtue and so be in a position to be awarded the same crown as his, to be transported into his bosom.
	De beato Abraham, *PG* 50.746.1–3.	*In Genesim* 42, *PG* 53.387. Hill, *Homilies on Genesis*, 2:421.

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